

FAMILIAR
LONDON BIRDS

FRANK FINN B.A., F.Z.S.



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FAMILIAR LONDON BIRDS



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Photo by R. B. Lodge]

COCK HOUSE-SPARROW ON SPHERE.

[Enfield.]

The Sparrow, having now been introduced into all quarters of the globe, may claim to have conquered the world.

7981

Familiar London

Birds . By Frank Finn,
B.A. (Oxon), F.Z.S.

Author of "*Birds of the Country Side*," "*Eggs
and Nests of British Birds*," : : etc. etc.

With 34 Illustrations
and . many
Diagrams



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PATERNOSTER ROW

[1923]

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High poised on pinions crook'd and wide,
The Osprey hung above the Zoo,
"Bird of the Seven Seas," I cried,
"What charm has London town for you?
What vision can our parks unfold,
To ocean-searching eyes of gold?"
"Bright shines the sea," the fish-hawk said,
"And brighter gleams my scaly prize;
Brightest, now here my wings are spread,
I've found the London maidens' eyes."

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CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
INTRODUCTION	I	BLACKCAP	63
HOUSE SPARROW ...	3	SEDGE-WARBLER ...	64
GREENFINCH	8	BLUE TIT	65
CHAFFINCH	9	GREAT TIT	68
LINNET	12	COAL TIT	69
REDPOLL	14	MARSH TIT.....	69
BRAMBLING	15	LONG-TAILED TIT ...	70
BULLFINCH	16	GOLD-CREST	71
GOLDFINCH	18	CREEPER	72
HAWFINCH	20	PIED WAGTAIL	73
YELLOWHAMMER ...	22	GREY WAGTAIL	74
SKYLARK	23	SWALLOW	75
HEDGE SPARROW ...	26	HOUSE-MARTIN	77
STARLING	28	SAND-MARTIN	79
BLACKBIRD	33	WREN	80
SONG-THRUSH	39	CARRION CROW	82
MISSEL-THRUSH	44	ROOK	84
REDWING	48	JACKDAW	86
FIELDFARE.....	50	MAGPIE.....	88
ROBIN	52	JAY	90
NIGHTINGALE	55	GREEN WOODPECKER	92
WHEATEAR.....	57	SWIFT	94
WHINCHAT	58	NIGHTJAR.....	96
FLYCATCHER	59	KINGFISHER	98
WILLOW-WARBLER ..	61	CUCKOO	100
CHIFFCHAFF	62	COMMON PIGEON....	103

	PAGE		PAGE
WOOD-PIGEON	107	WIGEON	140
STOCK-DOVE	112	SHOVELLER	142
TURTLE-DOVE	113	TUFTED DUCK	144
KESTREL	115	POCHARD	146
BROWN OWL	117	DABCHICK	148
HERON	119	GREAT C R E S T E D	
LAPWING	122	GREBE	150
COMMON SAND-PIPER	124	CORMORANT	151
MOORHEN	125	BLACK-HEADED GULL	153
COOT	128	HERRING-GULL	156
SWAN	129	COMMON GULL	158
WILD GOOSE	132	GREAT BLACK-BACKED	
WILD DUCK	133	GULL	159
GADWALL	137	LESSER BLACK-BACKED	
PINTAIL	138	GULL	160
TEAL	139		

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Cock House-Sparrow on Sphere	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Linnet and Greenfinch	<i>Facing p.</i> 12
Hawfinch	13
Hen Hedge-Sparrow	26
Male Starling	27
Hen Blackbird	34
Song-Thrush	35
Nightingale	56
Whinchat	57
Spotted Flycatcher feeding Young	60
Willow-Wren	61
Great Tit	68
Coal-Tit	69
Marsh-Tit	69
Grey Wagtail	74
Cock Pied Wagtail	74
Swallow	75
Dabchick	75
House-Martin and Nest	78
Sand-Martin outside Nest	79
Rooks	84
Jackdaw in Flight.	85
Magpie	88
Fledged Green Woodpecker	89
Swift clinging to a Twig	94
Wood-Pigeon	95
Pair of Kestrels	116
Tawny Owl	117
Pair of Herons	120
Lapwing	121
Coot	128
Great Crested Grebe	129
Immature Black-headed Gull in Flight	154
Herring Gull alighting	155

FAMILIAR LONDON BIRDS

LONDON offers unrivalled opportunities to people who take an interest in birds, whether they simply like watching them or wish to begin bird-study on a scientific basis.

It is true that not many different kinds of birds are found in London at all commonly, especially in the inner portions of our area ; but this is of itself an advantage to the beginner, since where many kinds of birds are found their very abundance is confusing.

Where there are only a few kinds, those that are strikingly different are easily learnt, and one has time to take notice of the differences between those that are more similar to each other.

Now, although the actual species of common London birds are few, they represent a wide range of families, and so one easily gets an acquaintance with different types ; for instance, everyone knows pigeons from gulls or crows, and these groups can all be studied in detail in London, and the differences between the various species of each can be easily made out, as the birds are so tame.

As over two hundred species of birds have been known to occur in the London district, I have had, in a work of this size, to make a selection including only those which are most likely to attract notice, especially in Inner London ; but I have not excluded caged finches or pinioned waterfowl, when the species are known also to occur wild, even though rarely.

THE HOUSE SPARROW

THE HOUSE SPARROW is the most widely-spread bird in London, and is familiar to everybody, both in streets and gardens, but there is much of interest in the habits of this despised little bird, perhaps the most progressive of the whole feathered race.

As I am writing for beginners, I may draw attention to a few points in its appearance, if only for comparison with other less familiar small birds.

The sparrow is noticeable among other birds of the same size by its thickset shape, with a short, stout, conical bill and short wings. In colour it is streaky-brown above and smoky-grey below, but the cock is much redder in colour on the back than the hen, and has also a grey cap bordered with chocolate, and a black bib.

These marks become much more distinct

in spring, when the male bird's beak also turns black. The young birds are like the hens, but the cocks soon begin to moult, and the more richly-coloured feathers on the back and wings soon show their sex.

There is a great difference in sparrows ; some get much more sooty and dirty than others, and in some, quite independently of cleanliness, the markings are clearer and the colours brighter, so that individuals can easily be distinguished.

Some show a white feather or two here and there, and now and then one may come across a pied bird, or even a pure white one, though these are very rare. There is also a cinnamon variety, and a blackish one, but one has to look carefully to make sure the sooty tint in such birds is natural, and not merely due to dirt. Some sparrows are rotten-feathered, as fanciers would say, and these can be recognized by having no tails, the feathers having broken off short at the root.

By observing sparrows with some such abnormal peculiarity of feathering, one can see that they are very home-loving birds, for once one can recognize a particular bird one can see that it remains in one particular locality for years together, probably until its death. I have more than once noticed this with pied or cinnamon specimens.

The cock sparrow, if a nice clean-looking specimen, is a really handsome little bird, and he does his best in the courting season to show off his beauties before the hen, hopping round her with wings down and head and tail up, only, in many cases, to get soundly pecked for his trouble, for the hen sparrow is a shrewish little wretch; I have even seen her suspend her mate from a bough by the scruff of his neck, regardless of his shrieks. She also leaves most of the house furnishing to him, presumably taking charge of the architectural details of the nest: at any rate it is the cock bird which is usually to be seen carrying

off straws, feathers, etc., often of remarkable size and very awkward to carry through the air.

The nest is placed high up, either in some hole or crevice in a tree or building, or in the boughs of a tree or bush. When placed in the open like this, it is a well-constructed though untidy-looking structure, roofed over at the top so as to leave only a small entrance-hole. In any case it is very well lined with feathers, or with strips of fibrous bark torn off from lime trees, the bird deliberately pecking down to the inner coating for this purpose. The eggs are white, very variously speckled with drab, but generally with a streaky effect.

Even in winter the sparrows may be seen carrying in bedding, for they often sleep in their nests at this season, though generally roughing it in the open. They are sociable even when nesting, and several nests may be found close together under eaves, on creepers, or in a tree; while, as everybody

must have noticed, they collect together to roost in the evening with much chattering and hail daybreak with another outburst of noise.

Besides these concerts, the sparrows have social bathing parties ; unlike most other birds, they go in both for dry and wet cleaning, for while they wash in water as a regular thing, they also greatly enjoy a good shuffle in the dust in dry weather.

They eat pretty nearly everything, chiefly what they pick up in the way of bread, etc., and the corn which is spilled from horses' food or can be picked out of their droppings ; but those that live near trees and grass also eat much natural food, especially the green seeds of the short grass and such insects as they can capture.

THE GREENFINCH

THE GREENFINCH much resembles the sparrow in size and general form, but is olive-green with yellow wing and tail markings, the hen being greenish-brown with less of this yellow; the same yellow markings are found on young birds, which are pale-coloured with many narrow dark streaks; but the greenfinch, like so many of our small birds, is not very much to be seen in its young plumage. The bird is chiefly a seed-eater, especially fond of sunflower seed, and pretty sure to turn up where sunflowers are grown.

The greenfinch is a strong, rather surly bird, well able to hold its own with the sparrow; it builds a cup-shaped nest rather low down in a bush, tree, or creeper, and the eggs are bluish-white with reddish spots.

It sings rather well, but is not often heard; but its long-drawn call-note, "twee-ee-ee," is a very common sound where it is found.

THE CHAFFINCH

THE CHAFFINCH is a slight elegant bird compared with the sparrow and greenfinch, and both sexes are readily to be known by the white markings on their wings and tails, and their peculiar movements—half walk and half hop—when they are on the ground.

The hen is greenish-drab in colour, and it is only her neat look and white trimmings which attract attention to her as something different from a hen sparrow; but the cock is quite a gay little bird, especially if seen in bright sunlight, having a blue-grey cap, a pinkish-fawn breast, and a yellowish-green patch on the lower part of the back, besides his white markings. Young cocks, like young cock sparrows, resemble the hen bird.

The chaffinch is, if anything, fonder of insects than the sparrow, though also feeding on seed; hemp-seed it particularly likes. It does not care much for green

food, and is very ready to feed on crumbs, etc., like the sparrow; in fact, in quiet places it shows great tameness, coming even, in winter, into streets; in Dorking I have seen birds in the High Street, and counted five in one small lane. This was in winter, but in summer I have seen a cock bird feeding at Kew in the middle of a circle of people, as tame as any fowl.

The chaffinch nests in trees as a rule, making a neater cup than any other British bird, and placing it in the fork of a large branch rather low down; the nest is commonly covered with lichen, and so is not easy to see, but sometimes the bird "gives the show away" by picking up and using the confetti thrown at weddings, thus saving itself a lot of trouble but making its home conspicuous. The eggs are grey, with dark reddish-edged spots.

The cock chaffinch is not a devoted parent like the cock sparrow, but leaves most of the home duties to his mate; but

he is a most untiring singer, and his short bright run of notes, ending in a longer, sharper one, like "dear" or "here," is easily recognized when once heard. The call-note, "pink, pink," which both sexes use, is also very noticeable, though the bird uttering it should be seen to make sure it is a chaffinch, for the great tit often gives a similar call.

The chaffinch is such a common cage-bird with working men in London that it is very easy to get acquainted with the appearance and notes of the male at any rate, even in the street districts where the wild bird never comes.

The other finches are often to be seen in bird shops, but not likely to be found wild except on the very outskirts of our area; but it is worth while to describe them shortly. They all build open nests, like the chaffinch and greenfinch, only the sparrows among our finches building domed nests or going into holes.

THE LINNET

THE LINNET is not unlike a hen sparrow, but smaller and more fully streaked, with narrow white edgings to the wings; it is well known as a cage-bird, but in a cage the male shows only the hen plumage after his first moult in captivity. When wild, he is a very pretty little bird in the spring, with the brown of the plumage richer and less streaked than the hen's, and the crown and breast adorned with patches of bright crimson-red; wild or tame, he always has more white on the edge of the quills than the hen.

The linnet feeds mostly on weed-seeds, and keeps to barren open country, building in furze-bushes, and seldom entering gardens; the eggs are like the greenfinch's, but smaller. It is a most charming singer, with a great variety of notes, none of them too loud, and certainly deserves its reputation as a pet. Next to the canary it is the



Photo copyright]

LINNET AND GREENFINCH.

[By W. F. Piggott.

The white edges to the Linnet's quills distinguish it from most other small brown birds.



Photo copyright]

[By W. F. Piggott.

HAWFINCH.

The huge beak characteristic of the Hawfinch is well shown in this photo, also the light-coloured eyes.

[See p. 2c.

commonest cage-bird in London, so that, as in the case of the chaffinch, its notes may be easily learnt far away from its haunts.

THE REDPOLL

THE REDPOLL is another streaky-brown bird with a red cap, but is much smaller than the linnet, being only half as big as a sparrow ; also it has the red cap in both sexes, and both have a black spot under the yellow bill. In spring the cock has a pink breast ; his song does not amount to much, and his call-note is like that of a canary—the well-known “ tweet.”

In London, as in most places, he is best known as a cage-bird ; he keeps generally well up in the trees, and so is less likely to be noticed than most of the finches, which come more near the ground. The nest is built in bushes or low trees, and the eggs are smaller than the linnet’s and brighter, being a distinct blue with rusty specks.

THE BRAMBLING

THE BRAMBLING, or bramble-finch, is a winter bird of uncertain appearance in our area ; but when it does come it is very easily identified. In shape, size, and movements, it is a counterpart of the chaffinch, but has a very conspicuous white patch on the lower part of the back, where the chaffinch is greenish ; and the light patches on the wings are deep buff or tan, as also is the breast, while the bill is yellow.

Even the hen can thus be easily distinguished from the hen chaffinch ; the cock shows much black on the head, where the cock chaffinch is bluish, and in spring is completely black on the cap and down to the shoulders. The Brambling resembles the chaffinch in habits, and is particularly fond of beech-mast ; it has not the “ pink-pink ” call, and has hardly any song, only one long-drawn harsh note.

THE BULLFINCH

THE BULLFINCH, which is also conspicuous by a white patch on its back above the tail, is one of our most stationary birds, and breeds in the more open parts of London, but is not common. In addition to the white patch, both cock and hen have black caps, wings and tails; but the cock has a blue-grey back and red breast, while the hen is brown below and drab above.

Young birds are lighter brown and have no black cap, but show the same black and white elsewhere as the old birds. The bullfinch much resembles the sparrow in size and shape, but has a more curved beak, which is always black. It is a bird of trees and bushes, not coming much to the ground, and feeding less on seed than other finches, its favourite diet being buds and berries, especially blackberries and privet-berries. It is considered a great nuisance in gardens

by its attacks on the buds of bushes and fruit trees, so that the fact that it is a favourite aviary bird is not to be regretted.

The note of the bullfinch is soft and gentle, like "hoop, hoop," and his song a weak low whistling; he is very much attached to his mate, and the family tend to keep together, bullfinches not going in such large flocks as the other finches often do. The nest has a foundation of small twigs, and the eggs are blue with purple spots.

THE GOLDFINCH

THE GOLDFINCH, so easily recognizable by its brilliant yellow and black wings, and the scarlet, black and white on its head, is generally considered the prettiest of our small birds ; the cock and hen are practically alike, though the male, as is usually the case in birds even when the sexes are similar, is slightly larger and brighter. The young have plain drab heads, and are not of so rich a brown on the body as the old birds.

The goldfinch is not common as a wild bird in London, though I have heard of it as seen even at Shepherd's Bush and in the Zoo ; but it has bred there. The nest is placed as a rule in trees, especially fruit trees, and some distance out on the branches ; it is almost as neat as the chaffinch's, and the eggs are pale blue, spotted with brown. The goldfinch

has very sweet silvery notes, and a pretty song ; it is a most useful as well as charming bird, feeding mostly on the seeds of weeds, especially those with fluffy parachutes, like dandelion, groundsel and especially thistle. It is also fond of hemp and poppy seed.

THE HAWFINCH

THE HAWFINCH, which is a shy bird of the tree-tops, generally only to be looked for in outlying wooded districts, is a very thick-set bird as big as a starling, with a huge thick bill. Its colour is fawn,



Head and foot of
Hawfinch.

chestnut and grey, with a black bib, and white and black in the wings and tail, the hen being but little duller than the cock. The young are paler, and spotted. The hawfinch feeds

largely on the stones of small stone fruit, such as cherries and haws, but also eats insects, and is very destructive to peas.

As it is a very wary bird, and has a ridiculously weak note, it is not often noticed or caught at its ravages, which are no doubt often put down to the

sparrow. Its nest is built high up in trees, and is like a large bullfinch's nest; the eggs are streaked with dark brown on a pale green or buff ground.

THE YELLOWHAMMER

THE YELLOWHAMMER is a long slim-built finch, of the sub-group known as buntings, with a small bill, and about the size of a sparrow. In colour it is streaky-brown, with a chestnut back and white feathers at the sides of the tail; the cock has a yellow head and breast, and looks rather like a cross between a sparrow and a canary. It is a bird of the outlying open districts; a fine cock I once saw in the Zoo must, I think, have been an escaped bird. The yellowhammer is mostly a ground feeder, though it perches high on hedges to sing its monotonous song, of a long stammer and a drawl, generally rendered as "a little bit of bread and no cheese." It also nests and roosts on the ground; the eggs are very characteristic, being white, curiously scrawled with hair-like lines of black, as if scribbled with a fine pen.

THE SKYLARK

THE SKYLARK stands quite by itself among our common birds, and is easily recognizable, though there is nothing very distinctive about its simple streaky-brown plumage except the white on each side of the tail. It is rather larger than the sparrow, and more elegantly shaped, with a small head and bill and large wings, well seen in its light easy flight, which is at the same time very powerful. Its most marked peculiarity of form is its long straight hind claws, which some say prevent it from perching. This is a mistake, as it can perch and occasionally does so, though usually a ground bird.

It runs actively as a rule, but hops when courting the hen, when also it erects its short crest, not noticeable in the ordinary way, and expands one of its wings. The hen is smaller than the cock,

but not different in plumage; the young, however, are paler, and mottled instead of streaked.

The skylark is celebrated for its song, which is given as a rule on the wing, the bird giving out a continuous stream of notes as he flies upwards in great spirals, till he becomes a mere speck. He sings for some time, hovering at his highest pitch, and then descends rapidly, his song dying away as he descends. His ordinary note is a short warbling call.

The skylark feeds on seeds, herbage and insects, and sometimes does much damage to sprouting corn. It is found commonly in the open parts of London, but is rare in the inner portions, no doubt because, as a ground-bird, sleeping and nesting on the earth, it is not safe near houses. At the same time, I have heard the bird singing just outside Olympia, at Shepherd's Bush, at London Road, Forest Hill, and near Gunnersbury station,

and have no doubt it was breeding, even at these places. Waste ground and railway banks no doubt offer it a chance now and then of making its nest, which is well concealed among grass and weeds. The eggs are mottled drab.

THE HEDGE SPARROW

THE HEDGE SPARROW, so called—the bird-dealers' name “hedge warbler” is more correct—is another bird which stands much by itself; although at first sight it may easily be taken for a sparrow, its small thin beak and slenderer form show it to be quite a different bird. Its plumage is also different from the real sparrow's, being more streaky, with the breast a clear dark grey; the legs are reddish.

The habits of the hedge sparrow are also quite distinct; it keeps close to cover, which the true sparrow avoids, and seldom perches high. It gets along by very short hops, and, except when it perches to deliver its weak little “twiddly” song, is always closely searching for food. This consists of both seeds and insects; it swallows the seed whole, digesting husk and all. Generally it picks



Photo by R. Chislett]

HEN HEDGE-SPARROW.

[Rotherham.

The slender bill of this bird, as compared with that of the House-Sparrow, should be noted, as well as its more crouching pose.



Photo by R. B. Lodge]

MALE STARLING

In the singing attitude, which is very characteristic, for the starling is the most constant singer of all our birds.

[Enfield.

up only very small morsels, and where birds are fed is satisfied with the minute crumbs the others leave, but it has a large appetite, and can even digest hemp seed, in spite of the hard husk.

It builds early, and low down in a bush, making a simple open nest, and laying most beautiful greenish-blue eggs, quite spotless. All over London, in parks and large gardens, this humble little bird is at home, generally to be seen alone or in pairs, though in the winter evenings little parties collect and fly about piping their weak call before going to roost.

THE STARLING

THE STARLING among our London birds ranks in numbers alongside the sparrow and pigeon, if indeed it does not surpass them nowadays. In size it is about twice as large as the sparrow, and is a trimly-built bird with long wings and a short tail, standing rather high on its legs, and with a long and very straight beak.

In colour it varies very much according to the time of year; in winter its dark plumage is thickly spotted with cream-colour, so that at a little distance it looks a brownish black, and its bill is black and its legs brown. In spring the bill turns yellow and the legs become reddish, while the spots disappear from the plumage, which then looks a glossy black at a distance, but close at hand is seen to be splendidly glossed with

green and violet, like shot silk, the narrow and pointed form of the feathers adding to the effect.

The hen bird does not usually lose her spots so completely as the cock, and is not quite so glossy, but one has to look closely to see the difference between the pair. The young are very different from either of their parents, being of a smoky brown colour without any markings, and with black beaks and legs.

The notes of the starling are quite as characteristic as his appearance, and when he is not looking for food he is almost always singing, even in the depth of winter ; in fact, he is always in song except when nesting and moulting.

The song is a curious medley of chattering, clucking and whistling, and given out with a great deal of gesticulation and waving of the wings ; the clear whistled cry that comes in every now and then is very characteristic, and many

starlings are very adept at imitating other birds. In former days, when parrots were not so easy to get, starlings were often reared from the nest and taught to talk, but this is hardly ever done nowadays.

This bird is mainly an animal feeder, and generally seeks its food on the grass, bustling actively about and parting the blades by opening its beak. It usually walks or runs, and hops if in a hurry; it is quite at home in the trees, but does not often perch in bushes or go into cover, being a wary bird and liking to keep in the open. The chief vegetable food I have seen it take is elderberries, of which it is passionately fond, and in search of them will come lower down than it is usually accustomed to perch. It also feeds freely on fruit, and indeed is now a rather destructive bird, though doing an immense amount of good by destroying insects. Worms form a large

part of its food, but unlike most other worm-eating birds, it also chases insects on the wing, and in the height of summer many may be seen hawking after their prey high in the air, almost like swallows.

Starlings are indeed the most powerful flyers among our common birds in inner London, and so can afford to nest at some distance from their feeding-grounds if necessary, and may be found nesting even in streets, the nest being made in some crevice of a building ; in parks and gardens, holes in trees are also used. The nest is a big untidy affair made of straws, etc., and the eggs are long-shaped and of a very pale blue without spots.

Several nests may be found close together, for the starling is sociable at all times, and the young begin to associate in flocks on their own account as soon as they can look after themselves. In winter all associate together, the young birds having by that time lost their brown plumage

and become spotted, and the flocks are a most interesting sight as they wheel and manœuvre in the air, all turning at once as if in obedience to orders.

When not breeding they roost in company in the tops of trees or in crevices of buildings. Enormous numbers now resort to London to roost, and certainly at night outnumber all other London birds, whatever may be the case in the daytime. They are also now breeding in more urban surroundings ; both last year and this (1923) there was a nest in Whitehall. Now and then, too, one or two birds may be seen feeding on scraps in a street, even in fine weather. Flocks seem never to do this, and I noticed that when the birds first took to roosting on Nelson's Column, they only dropped in by ones and twos ; so, evidently, with this very human bird, as well as with ourselves, progress is only initiated by the superior few.

THE BLACKBIRD

THE BLACKBIRD, being a dark-coloured bird with a yellow beak, is often confused with the starling, but the two differ very much in shape and habits. The blackbird is the larger of the two, being just about intermediate in size between the sparrow and the pigeon, and has quite different proportions from the starling, for its tail is long and its wings short. Its movements are also different, for it usually hops, though now and then taking a short run, and it does not bustle about when looking for worms and insects, but often pauses as if in thought, and then makes a pounce on some prey or other. It also keeps much to cover, and when flying seldom rises high, preferring to dodge between trees or buildings rather than fly over them.

It is only the cock blackbird that is

black, and his plumage is really coal-black, without any glossy reflections or play of colour, but it is well set off by his bright yellow bill and eyelids, and his elegant form and stylish attitudes; especially noticeable is the bird's trick of often throwing up his tail, especially when he settles.

The hen blackbird is dark chocolate-brown, and often has a black beak; but many London hen blackbirds also have yellow bills, which is not usual in the country. She is larger than her mate, who stands in considerable awe of her, though he is very demonstrative in his courtship, generally running round his wife on the ground, spreading and sweeping his tail over the grass. Once, however, I watched a blackbird courting his mate on a low tree, posing stiffly on the boughs with outstretched neck and tail straight down, or taking short flights with his tail still held down; the only notice the



Photo by G. H. Bentley]

[Sheffield.

HEN BLACKBIRD-

Feeding small young ; the construction of the nest
is typical.



Photo by A. W. Westrop]

[Bridgnorth.]

SONG-THRUSH.

A very characteristic photograph, showing the narrow longitudinal spots ; those of the Missel-Thrush are broad.

[See p. 39.]

lady took of all the display being to hop towards him threateningly with her tail at full cock.

Young blackbirds are brown like the hen, but of a lighter and rustier shade, and with a certain amount of mottling, showing their relationship to the speckled thrushes. They have black beaks as a rule, though I once saw a quite young bird with a yellow beak, and the young cock's beak remains black for some time after he has assumed his black plumage. Like most birds, too, he does not moult his quills during his first year, so that a yearling cock blackbird is always recognizable by his rusty wings.

Cock blackbirds seem much more numerous than hens, but the hens are much shyer, and keep more to cover; and when a pair are disturbed when feeding in the open, the cock will generally fly off, while the hen keeps to the ground and hops away to the bushes. It is

perhaps owing to the comparative scarcity of hens that most of the pied blackbirds one sees are males. Such white-marked specimens are not uncommon, and I once knew one for about three years, which used to live at the south end of Regent's Park. During the whole of the time he always, as far as I saw, kept within a range of about a hundred yards.

Blackbirds are not at all sociable, and, except in the breeding season, are generally seen alone, at any rate when adult, though the young are more inclined to associate. The male is a very beautiful singer, and has two quite distinct styles of song: in the very early morning his song is loud, and consists of various repeated phrases, but later in the day he sings more lazily, with a very flute-like tone, and in a disconnected manner as if he were merely practising. He sings throughout the spring, but not at other times.

In addition to worms and insects, the

blackbird feeds on slugs ; but he is, unfortunately, also very fond of small fruit. Among wild berries, he eats haws freely, and is very fond of mountain-ash and white-beam berries. He readily feeds on scraps in winter, and will come into small gardens and yards where other thrushes hardly ever venture.

Blackbirds nest in trees and bushes, usually within hand's reach ; the nest is a solid deep cup of moss and grass, cemented with mud, and lined with fine grass. The eggs are four or five in number, and sea-green in colour, freckled with brown ; and at least two broods are reared in a season.

As the blackbird, though nervous and wary, is yet an enterprising and prolific bird, it is not surprising that it is the most numerous of thrushes in our area, and the most conspicuous of our song-birds, the poor starling's enthusiastic efforts not being regarded as singing by most

people. Even when not in song, it attracts attention by its loud cackle, "chook-chook-chook-chook," when alarmed; it keeps up a loud comment of this sort on anything which disturbs it. Blackbirds sometimes sing on the wing, and on one occasion at the Zoo I noticed a bird not only doing this but carrying a worm at the same time. They are also inclined to sing in wet weather—which of course means prosperity in the shape of worms—and I have seen one bathing while it rained, as if he thought he might as well get as wet as possible while he was about it.

THE SONG-THRUSH

THE SONG-THRUSH is probably well known to most people ; it is not quite so large as the blackbird, but bigger than the starling, and its spotted breast and nut-brown upper parts have an individuality of their own. So also have its grave, quiet ways ; it is a very sedate bird, without any of the tail-jerking, excitable actions of the blackbird. In its gait it is less given to taking little runs between its hops, and in its food it shows less liking for fruit and berries, and a special weakness for snails as well as worms, which the blackbird does not share.

It gets rid of the snails' shells by battering them on some convenient stone, returning again and again to the same one, till the " thrush-stone " is conspicuous by the litter of broken shells about it. I have never seen such a stone in the

London parks, where snails are scarce, but I have seen a thrush battering a doubled-up lobworm in just the same way on the bottom rail of the iron fence in St. James' Park, opposite the Horse Guards. The incident interested me, not only because I had never seen or heard of thrushes treating worms in this way as well as snails, but also because the bird was within a foot of me as I stood on the other side of the fence, thus showing remarkable tameness even for a thrush.

For the London thrush almost rivals the robin in its confidence in man, though it has not the venturesomeness of the blackbird in visiting small enclosed places. It is glad of artificial food in winter, though not perhaps so ready to take to it as the blackbird and starling, but I have seen it come up to be fed like a sparrow on more than one occasion. One used to come to the Tunnel bar at

the Zoo for contributions from the girls in charge.

Song-thrushes nest in much the same situations as blackbirds, and the nest is similarly made for the most part, but is smoothly plastered inside with mud or some such material—country thrushes use cow-dung for the purpose—with no soft lining at all. This seems a very hard bed for callow young birds, and is apt to result in their being drowned in case of violent rain, so that it is hard to see why this bird should insist on such a peculiar nursery floor.

The eggs are also peculiar, all our other thrushes laying eggs more of the blackbird's type; those of the song-thrush are a beautiful greenish-blue with few, but very distinct, markings of black, so that they can be distinguished at once from those of any other British bird. The number laid is about that of the blackbird's eggs.

The thrush's song is also very distinctive

and unlike that of any other of our birds, although the blackbird's matin performance rather reminds one of it. It is composed of a series of phrases, often sounding almost like human speech, with pauses between them, and each one repeated more than once, such as "Dear, dear, dear, dear"—"Did-you-do-it, did-you-do-it, did-you-do-it" and so on, with great variation, for individual thrushes differ much in their songs. I once heard one in the Zoo grounds which had such beautiful and unusual notes that I did not recognize them, and could not convince myself that the bird was an ordinary song-thrush till I had had a good look and made sure of it.

In inner London, at any rate, the thrush sings all the year round except in the height of the busy nesting season and when moulting; it does not always cease at nightfall, nor will fog silence it, and I have heard it in the morning in winter

when the moon was still high, so that it contributes more music per bird than any other of the recognized musicians.

The plumage and size of cock and hen thrushes show no difference, and the male is almost as quiet and undemonstrative in the courting season as at other times ; I have, myself, hardly ever seen a song-thrush show off or fight. The young are easily recognizable, though, as they are spotted above with buff as well as with black on the breast, they have a rather mottled appearance all over.

THE MISSEL-THRUSH

THE MISSEL-THRUSH is so like the song-thrush that no doubt most people who well know a thrush when they see it, do not distinguish between these two kinds ; but their distinctions are very real, and the making of them out is excellent practice in ornithology.

What first strikes one about the missel-thrush is its size and its bold carriage ; it is bigger even than the hen blackbird—nearly as large as a dove, in fact—keeps its head well up, and hops along in a dignified way, not occasionally stooping and running like the song-thrush. Its back is paler and duller, a dust- rather than a nut-brown, and its under parts fully spotted all over with broad spots, while in the song-thrush the spots are narrow and do not go below the breast.

But the difference is more conspicuous

when the bird takes wing ; for then a flash of white in the missel-thrush shows that its wings are white underneath, and the spreading of its tail shows that this has a white tip at each corner. Both tail and wings are longer proportionately in this bird than in the song-thrush, and the flight is higher and bolder, with more regular wing-beats—somewhat like a pigeon's, in fact.

The missel-thrush is much more a bird of the open than the song-thrush and blackbird, and more sociable. The cock and hen are seldom far apart, and in winter several birds associate in small flocks. It is a strong, fierce bird, and notorious for its bold attacks on crows, hawks, and other enemies of bird life ; while, when its nest is approached, it will threaten even human enemies, though it is generally more shy of man than our commoner thrushes. The London missel-thrushes, however, are often rather tame ; in cold

snowy weather some winters ago I actually found a pair feeding on crushed biscuit on my window-sill as tamely as the sparrows, and this was at the foot of Primrose Hill, in a region of small backyards. It is very likely this pair that has bred in the Zoo grounds, where I often see these birds.

The missel-thrush is fonder of fruit and berries than the song-thrush, and I have even seen it eat holly-berries, and this in mild weather, and on a low tree in a small front garden in a narrow street in Dorking; there missel-thrushes were very common in the fields outside the town, and shyer than their companions, the rooks, wood-pigeons, and lapwings. The missel-thrush is also credited with being the only bird which eats mistletoe berries, and is said to derive its name therefrom. Sometimes also it aspires to higher game than worms, etc., and kills the young of other birds.

Its voice is as characteristic as its habits; when alarmed or angry it has a loud rattling screech, and its song is a frequent repetition of a few loud notes, so that it is not commonly recognized as a songster.

The nest is placed much higher up than that of the song-thrush, and has not the mud plastering; it is easily seen, the bold birds seeming to defy enemies. The eggs are not at all like those of the song-thrush, but more resemble the black-bird's; but they are far handsomer, being spotted with red and mauve on a ground which is as often cream-colour as greenish.

As in the song-thrush, the sexes are alike, and the young pale-spotted above, these spots being white instead of buff.

Owing to this bold bird's habit of frequently singing in stormy weather, country people call it "Stormcock."

THE REDWING

THE REDWING, which is only a winter visitor, is another bird which can easily be mistaken for the song-thrush, being very similar in build and general colour. In this case, however, the bird is decidedly smaller than the song-thrush, and its conspicuous cream-coloured eyebrows are a noticeable distinction, more so than the chestnut-red of the wings, which is only on their underside, and so not noticeable till the bird takes flight; even in repose, however, some red can be seen, but this is on the long flank-feathers which overlap the wings.

Redwings are usually seen in flocks, being sociable birds; their action in hopping and their flight rather resemble those of the missel-thrush, but they are quiet birds with low unobtrusive notes. They feed less on berries than other thrushes,

and so are more liable to starvation in the open districts ; in the parks they seem to fare well enough, at any rate in Regent's Park, where it is, or used quite recently to be, possible year after year to see a flock on a bit of damp low ground at the north end, near the Zoo.

THE FIELDFARE

THE FIELDFARE, which is also a sociable winter visitor, seems to be less common now than the redwing, at any rate in inner London. I have only once noticed it in Regent's Park, where one haunted the model allotments for several days during one severe winter; at first I saw one or two others, but only once.

It is a pity the bird is not commoner, for it is the handsomest of our thrushes and forms a sort of link between the black and spotted kinds, having black legs and tail and a yellow bill, as well as a brown back and mottled breast. The head and a patch above the tail are grey, and this light patch between the darker colours marks off the bird very distinctly in its flight. Its flight is like that of the missel-thrush, and it is nearly as large a bird; on the ground its move-

ments are like the blackbird's, as it runs as well as hops, and flirts its tail somewhat. Its alarm-note, "chak, chak," also rather reminds one of the blackbird's longer cackle. It feeds much on berries, as well as worms, etc.

THE ROBIN

THE ROBIN is such a well-known favourite that it seems hardly worth while to describe him ; but as other red-breasted birds are sometimes mistaken for robins, it may be as well to mention that the real bird has a red face as well as a red breast ; the hen is like the cock, but the young birds are dark brown, spotted with buff, and show no red till they moult in their first autumn. No doubt these are often mistaken for hens, as there is a widespread idea that hen robins are not red-breasted.

The robin's very unsociable character tends also to make people think all they see are cocks, for, except in the nesting season, the two sexes do not associate, each robin driving away all others from its chosen beat. This bird is a free singer, the song being sweet

but rather melancholy, and especially noticed in autumn and winter, when there is less competition from other songsters.

About its home-range the robin wanders in a casual sort of way, not busily searching for food, nor merely waiting for it, but hopping and flying here and there, and perching, generally on low perches, where there is a good outlook, and pouncing on any insect or worm that it fancies. It is partial even to large lob-worms, and breaks them up with surprising ease for such a small bird ; its short slender beak is, indeed, much stronger than it seems, and in the frequent fights which occur between robins one is not infrequently killed.

The robin is also not friendly with any other birds, but is very much inclined, as everyone knows, to make friends with people, and is one of the most harmless birds in a garden, as he rarely touches fruit. He often comes into houses, and

sometimes even nests there if permitted ; out in the open all sorts of queer nesting-places are chosen, the great requisite being a firm support and, if possible, a roof over the nest, though an actual hole, such as the sparrow and tits favour, is not liked. Thus crevices in walls, old shoes or kettles, or other out-of-the-way sites are favoured, a low position being preferred to a high one. The nest is a loose, untidy affair largely made up of dead leaves, and the eggs are white, speckled with reddish-brown.

The robin is found here and there all over the London district, breeding even in the inner parks and large gardens.

THE NIGHTINGALE

THE NIGHTINGALE, having its stronghold in the south-eastern counties, is naturally common about London, and inhabits the wooded open spaces on the outskirts, but does not penetrate into the inner parks. Those who have heard its wonderfully deep, rich and pure notes, or read about it, are apt to be surprised when they see such a small bird pointed out to them as the nightingale ; it is, indeed, hardly so big as the robin, being slenderer in build, but otherwise closely resembling it in form and movements.

It is a simple brown bird without any striking touch of colour, except that the tail, which is of a very reddish brown, shows rather conspicuously as the bird flies to cover. It does not come far into the open, and nests on the ground in a bush or hedge, making the nest mostly



Photo by E. L. Turner]

[Girton, Cambridge.

WHINCHAT.

The white eyebrows are the most striking feature of this pretty little bird.

[See p. 58.

THE WHEATEAR

THE WHEATEAR is a summer visitant which comes very early in spring, and may then be seen even in our inner parks, conspicuous as a long-legged bird rather resembling a robin, but larger and of a pale fawn colour, with a very conspicuous though short black-tipped white tail. In full plumage the cock has a pale grey back and a black patch around the eye.

The Wheatear keeps in the open and perches on the ground or on some very low perch. It feeds on insects, and its nest is to be looked for on commons and wastes, concealed in some hole in the ground; the eggs are pale blue. The note is "chuck, chuck," like two stones struck together, but the male has a good song.

THE WHINCHAT

THE WHINCHAT is another short-tailed bird of the robin type, but in this case much smaller than a robin, and also a summer visitor which may be met with almost anywhere in the open in spring and autumn. It is of a mottled brown colour, with a buff breast and conspicuous white eyebrows and a white patch on wing and root of tail. The hen is duller. The whinchat is also an insect-feeder, but more of a percher than the wheatear; it haunts rough grassy, bushy places, concealing its nest in the grass. The eggs are blue, with a fine freckling of brown. The ordinary note is "u-tick," but the male is a songster and mimic.

THE FLYCATCHER

THE FLYCATCHER, which is the most widely-spread summer bird with us in London, breeding even in the parks, is a slim, short-legged little bird of plain drab plumage, with dark streaks on the head and breast and a slender black bill ; the feet are also black. It is only spotted when young, although generally called "spotted flycatcher" in books ; the spots are white, not buff as in young robins and thrushes, and the young birds consequently look as if sprinkled with flour.

The flycatcher's habits, however, are more noticeable than anything about its appearance ; it is one of the few birds we have which sit and wait for their food, rather than hunt for it. From a low perch on a railing or dead bough it watches for flies and other winged insects, darting

out on them and returning to its stand with a very light and graceful flight.

It nests, like the robin, on some position affording a good support, as on the bough of a tree trained against a wall, or in some crevice ; but the situation chosen is not low down, and is often well out of reach. The eggs are pale green, marbled with red.

The flycatcher is not a very early visitor to us, arriving in May, and is a very quiet bird ; it is a most useful little creature, and the execution it does among insects may be readily seen if one finds a deposit of the “castings,” which, like so many birds feeding on animal food, it throws up ; these consist of the indigestible parts of the prey, and if the flycatcher has been preying much on bluebottles, resemble little shiny blue pills.



Photo by C. Reid]

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER FEEDING YOUNG.

It is noticeable that the old bird is not really spotted, but streaked.

[Wishaw, N.B.]



Photo by S. Crook]

[Preston.

WILLOW-WREN.

This is a very graceful little bird, but slow in its movements compared with the Tits.

THE WILLOW-WARBLER

THE WILLOW-WARBLER is the little yellowish-green bird, as small as a blue tit but much more slender and elegant, that wanders through the trees everywhere at the beginning of August, telling us with his melancholy little song with the falling finish that summer will not last much longer.

In the outer parts his little strain may be heard all summer, for he nests with us, making a domed structure of grass and moss, lined with feathers, on or near the ground.

The eggs are white, more or less speckled with red. The willow-wren, as it is sometimes called, though not allied to the wren, feeds upon small insects, generally procured in the trees ; it is only a summer visitor, but in spite of its small size a very noticeable one.

THE CHIFFCHAFF

THE CHIFFCHAFF is another summer bird, very like the willow-warbler, but smaller and browner, with darker legs ; it is not so common with us as the willow-warbler, but, if anything, more noticeable, as the curious double note from which it derives its name is constantly uttered by the cock, and it comes earlier in spring, even before the trees are in leaf, being our earliest summer visitor except, sometimes, the wheatear.

It nests in bushes near the ground, making a nest like the willow-warbler's, but laying eggs spotted with dark brown instead of red. It also feeds on small insects in the trees.

THE BLACKCAP

THE BLACKCAP is the most striking in appearance of our warblers, and may be seen even in the parks and wayside trees on migration, for it is a common summer visitor. It is about as long as a sparrow but much slimmer, with grey plumage set off by a black cap in the male, the hen being of a browner grey with a brown cap ; the young have also brown caps.

The blackcap feeds partly on insects, and partly on berries and fruit, and is a very good songster, sometimes being called "mock nightingale."

It keeps to trees and bushes, building a cup-shaped nest of grass and other fibres ; the eggs are dark-spotted on a ground of pale brown, bluish, or greenish, and sometimes the general colour is red.

THE SEDGE-WARBLER

THE SEDGE-WARBLER is a noisy, chattering little summer bird, to be found wherever there is cover and water on the outskirts of London ; it is about as big as the blue tit, but slender and slim, and coloured like a hen sparrow.

Its babbling song is intermixed with imitations of other birds, and is often to be heard at night, while the bird is so excitable that a stone thrown at it only makes it reply with a burst of chattering. The deep, cup-shaped nest of grass is placed among bushes and weeds, and the eggs are cream, freckled with brown.

THE BLUE TIT

THE BLUE TIT, with its plumage of light blue above and sulphur-yellow below, is quite common in London wherever there are trees, and one of the most easily recognizable of our little birds; it is very small, only about half the size of a sparrow. On the head the blue forms a particularly bright cap, contrasting well with the pure white cheeks, which are bordered with dark blue. The beak is very small, and the head-feathering full, so that the bird seems to have a "face" unlike most birds other than parrots or owls.

The hen is noticeably less bright than the cock, and the colours of the young are still fainter, and their cheeks pale yellow. They are not very often to be seen compared with the old ones, which are among the commonest of our London small birds, especially in winter, coming even into

backyards near open spaces, if there are trees in these.

Generally speaking, the blue tit keeps fairly high up, frequenting trees rather than bushes; but sometimes it even comes to the ground, where it hops along very nimbly, as if it were used to preying there. On the trees it is a marvel of activity, never still a moment, pecking at twigs and bark, clinging upside down as often as perching right side up, and when it has finished flitting with bouncing flight to the next tree.

It seems to have a regular round, as I have noticed that a pair worked outside my window at about the same time each day. Its short little bill is very strong, and with it it picks at bark and buds to discover insects, which form its main food, though it also eats a little fruit, and sometimes damages pears a good deal.

It is fond of hemp-seed, which it cracks

by holding it down with its feet and hammering on it with its bill, and shelled nuts are also a treat to it, as well as any sort of hard fat.

Once a bird actually came on to my hand for a bit of monkey-nut, not being able to catch this when I threw it up because of the jostling mob of sparrows ; it had previously plainly asked for food, first by hovering in front of my face, and then by settling on the ground and looking up at me. This was in Regent's Park, and the tit looked healthy and the weather was mild, so that it could not have been distressed for food.

Blue-tits nest in any sort of hole, in a tree, wall, lamp-post, etc., making a bed of feathers and moss and laying several white eggs speckled with red. They also sleep in holes, not on a perch like most small birds. Their note is a little chatter, which is frequently uttered.

THE GREAT TIT

THE GREAT TIT is nearly as common as the blue tit, and even more strikingly coloured, with a black-and-white head, olive-green and blue-grey upper parts, and yellow breast traversed by a black streak, which ends in a point in the hen and expands into a patch in the cock. The young are only slightly duller than the old birds.

In general habits, food and nesting, and in the colour of the eggs, the great tit resembles the blue tit, but as it is much larger—nearly as big as a sparrow, in fact—it can tackle larger and harder articles of food, being very fond of sunflower seed, and sometimes killing other small birds to devour their brains. In addition to its chatter, it has a spring note like “Peter, Peter, Peter,” and also one like the “pink, pink” of the chaffinch.



Photo by S. Crook

GREAT TIT.

[Preston.]

A very clear and characteristic front view of a male bird, whose sex is shown by the length and breadth of the black streak down the breast.



Photo copyright]

[By Herman Lee.

COAL-TIT.

The conspicuous white patch at the back of the head distinguishes this bird from the Marsh-Tit.

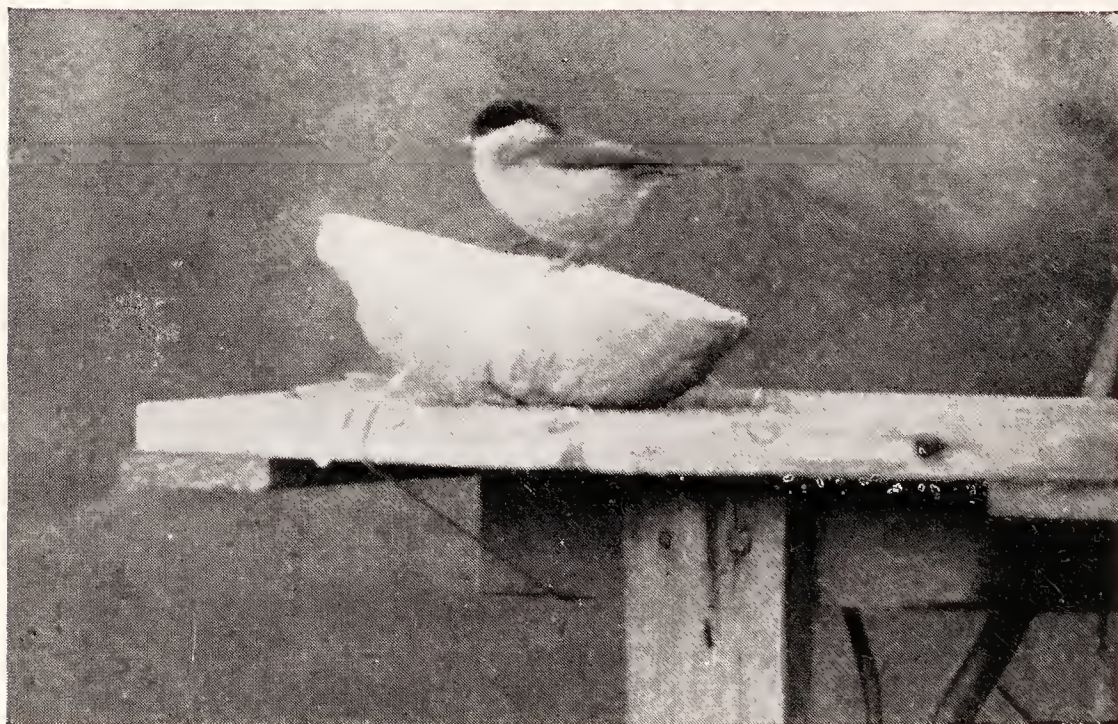


Photo copyright]

[By Herman Lee.

MARSH-TIT

Feeding on a piece of bread tied to a "bird-table."

THE COAL TIT

THE COAL TIT is about the size of the blue tit, but has a black and white head like the great tit, a white patch on the back of the neck, and a drab body with a light bar on the wing. It is not nearly as common as the last two, but I have seen it in Regent's Park.

THE MARSH TIT

THE MARSH TIT is another small drab tit, with a black cap and pale cheeks ; it is very like the coal tit, but has not the white patch at the back of the crown or the pale wing-bar. This also is not very common ; in habits both it and the coal tit much resemble the blue tit.

THE LONG-TAILED TIT

THE LONG-TAILED TIT is very different from the others in several ways. It is very tiny, with a minute beak but a very long black-and-white tail; its fluffy plumage is coloured black, white, and dull pink. It feeds practically entirely on small insects, and does not build in holes, but makes a beautiful nest in a tree or bush, an upright oval with a small entrance-hole in the side, constructed of moss and lichen, and plentifully lined with feathers.

The eggs are numerous, red-speckled or plain, and the young birds, which have no pink in their plumage, follow the old ones for some time, and the whole family roost huddled together on a twig. This charming little bird is most found in the open parts of London, and is not very common, but I have heard of a flock seen as far in town as Maida Vale.

THE GOLD-CREST

THE GOLD-CREST is our smallest British bird ; it is a tiny olive-green creature, looking about as big as a walnut, with a bill like a black pin. It has a streak of yellow on the crown—bright orange in the cock—which is wanting in the young birds.

It resembles the long-tailed tit in its habits, but is not sociable, and feeds on tiny insects.

It chiefly frequents pine and fir trees, and builds its nest, a covered hammock of moss and spiders' webs, suspended from the twigs. The eggs are dirty white, and about the size of peas. It is not common in London, but I have seen it in Regent's Park.

THE CREEPER

THE CREEPER is about the size of a blue tit, and is to be seen climbing up trees and walls, searching for its food of insects with its long curved bill. It is brown streaked with buff above and pure white below, but in town its white breast gets much soiled by contact with the dirty bark. It is solitary and not common. The nest is made in some crack or behind loose bark, and the eggs are white, well spotted with mauve and dark brown.

THE PIED WAGTAIL

THE PIED WAGTAIL is noticeable among our small birds of a sparrow's size by its active running gait, long quivering tail, and striking black-and-white plumage ; in the hen the back is largely grey instead of black, and the young are much greyer than either, but the family resemblance is unmistakeable:

This pretty bird, which lives on insects captured either on foot or on the wing, and often paddles in shallow water, is not uncommon in London, and I have seen it even in the breeding season in Regent's Park.

It builds in a crevice like the robin, and makes a similar simple nest ; the eggs are white, closely mottled with drab.

The sharp double note, like "chizzick," is uttered as it starts on its bounding flight, which usually terminates on the ground ; but it roosts in trees, and sometimes perches on them in the day.

THE GREY WAGTAIL

THE GREY WAGTAIL is a little smaller than the pied, and even more slender and elegant ; its plumage is grey above and yellow below, with a black-and-white tail.

It does not breed near London, but is not uncommon, even in the inner parks, in winter, when it is very constant to a chosen haunt, always at the edge of water, whereas the other is just as often seen on lawns, etc., away from it. In summer the cock has a black throat, but the throat in winter is white.



Photo by E. W. Tayler]

[York.

GREY WAGTAIL.

The male bird, showing the black bib of the summer dress.



Photo by E. W. Tayler]

[York.

COCK PIED WAGTAIL.

The cock only differs from the hen in having the back all black, while in the hen it is more or less grey.

[See p. 73.



Photo copyright]

[By W. S. Berridge, F.Z.S.

SWALLOW.

This shows the dark colour of the Swallow's throat and breast.



Photo copyright]

[By W. S. Berridge, F.Z.S.

DABCHICK.

The very silky character of the plumage and backward situation of the legs are well shown here.

[See p. 148.

THE SWALLOW

THE SWALLOW is known to most people as a long-winged, fork-tailed little bird, remarkable for its speed and skill in flight ; but as it is often confused with its relatives, the martins, and with the swift, which belongs to a quite distinct family, it should be noted that the typical swallow is deep steel-blue above, looking black at a distance, and has a band of that colour below the chestnut-red throat, all below this being cream-colour ; while the tail, which is much longer and more deeply forked than in the other birds mentioned, is tipped with a band of white spots.

The hen has the long side-feathers of the tail not quite so long as in the cock, and the young have much shorter ones, and are paler on the throat and under parts.

The swallow lives on insects, generally caught on the wing, and builds on some

ledge under a roof, making a nest of mud and grass in the form of a shallow half-cup stuck against the wall. The eggs are white, spotted with brown and grey, and two broods are reared during the season ; as everyone knows, the swallow is a summer bird, coming in April and generally leaving in September. It is a pretty songster, singing both on the wing and when perched on a wire, roof, or bare twig.

Generally swallows are only to be seen in inner London during the spring and autumn migration, but I have known a pair to nest in the Zoo grounds not many years ago. On the outskirts of London the bird is common enough.

THE HOUSE-MARTIN

THE HOUSE-MARTIN, which is all pure white below, and has a big white patch on its blue-black back—its plumage showing only these two colours—is stouter-built than the swallow, and has a shorter, less forked tail. Its feet are covered with white feathers, as may be seen when it toddles about on the ground collecting mud for its nest, which is placed under eaves, and built up to them, leaving a small entrance-hole, thus being much larger than the swallow's nest and different in shape. It is well lined with feathers.

The eggs are pure white, and, as with the swallow, two broods are reared during the bird's stay in spring and summer. In general habits this bird resembles the swallow, but does not perch on trees, and seldom dips in the water to wash as the swallow does. It is also no songster.

Like the swallow, it is mostly seen in inner London at migration time, but it is commoner and comes further into town ; I have seen it nesting at Highgate and Brockley of late years.



Photo by R. B. Lodge]

HOUSE-MARTIN AND NEST.

The white-feathered feet show well in this picture.

[Enfield.



Photo by E. W. Tayler]

SAND-MARTIN OUTSIDE NEST.

[*York.*

The brown back might be protective if the bird nested alone, but in a colony there is always some movement going on, and the exposure of the white part of the plumage betrays it.

THE SAND-MARTIN

THE SAND-MARTIN, which is easily known from our other swallows by its smaller size and light brown upper parts, the under plumage being white, is to be found in the outer parts of London during its summer stay with us, and in the spring and autumn may be met with in the parks.

It only breeds in a few places, its nesting requirements being exacting, as it does not build a mud nest, but burrows into a bank, pit, or railway cutting, or similar wall-like expanse of sufficiently soft soil, driving in its shaft for several feet, a most remarkable feat for such a small bird with tiny bill and feet. The nest, placed in a chamber at the end of the burrow, is made of grass and feathers, and the eggs are white.

Like the swallow and house-martin, this bird feeds on flying insects, and is fond of resting on telegraph wires, but it comes and leaves earlier than the other two.

THE WREN

THE WREN is almost as distinct from all our other small birds as the swallow tribe, but in quite the opposite way. It is a very tiny russet-brown bird, with a very short tail, usually held straight up, a slender bill, and short rounded wings.

It seldom flies far, and has a weak-looking flight, as if it had only just left the nest. On foot it is always in motion, hopping about among stones and twigs, usually near the ground, but often on trees, where it sometimes climbs up the bark like a mouse ; in fact, the Norse name, "mouse's-brother," gives an excellent idea of it.

It feeds on insects, and is to be found here and there anywhere in open spaces in London, especially in the winter, though never abundant. The nest is domed and large, but well concealed, and placed almost

anywhere, up in the twigs of a tree or down in a bank ; it is made of moss, leaves, etc., in fact any material that comes handy, and lined with feathers, but often the cock constructs other nests without a lining, which are used as sleeping-places.

The eggs are numerous, and white with rust-red spots. The song of the wren is very loud and bright, and is often heard, even in winter.

THE CARRION CROW

THE CARRION CROW, being a big black bird with a slow heavy flight, is so conspicuous that one can hardly fail to notice it, though it cannot be called numerous, and it is to be seen even in the parks and squares even in inner London, usually singly or in pairs. Cock, hen and young are all black throughout, and when several are seen together they are probably a family party.

The crow feeds on worms, insects and any other small helpless creatures it can catch ; it readily eats dead animals—its full name, indeed, being carrion crow—and it is also very fond of eggs. Other birds are afraid of it. I have seen wood-pigeons leave a tree, and ducks waddle into the water when it appeared close by, but our gulls, though they rise if it swoops at them on the ground, will return the

compliment when on the wing, the crow seeming to enjoy dodging them. It eats bread readily, and when seen to descend on a roof is probably attracted by a bit dropped by sparrows.

It breeds in London, making a large nest of sticks high up in a tree, on a large branch near the trunk ; the eggs are greenish-blue, spotted with brown.

In Scotland and Ireland a grey crow, with black head, wings and tail—the hooded crow—is common ; this is chiefly a winter bird in England, and I have once seen one in London, many years ago, on a foggy day in November, when it perched on a small tree in the Zoo, no doubt attracted by the captive crows there. This crow is not really a distinct species, for where the two kinds meet they pair together indiscriminately, like the different colour varieties of the street pigeons.

THE ROOK

THE ROOK is much commoner on the outskirts of London than the crow, from which it can be distinguished, when adult, by its bare whitish face ; this bareness is not due to digging for food, as is often stated, for the feathers which cover the face in young birds may be seen to disappear gradually in captive birds kept on a hard floor where they cannot dig.

Besides this distinction, the rook is to be distinguished from the crow by its slightly smaller size, thinner bill and looser feathering, and especially by its voice, for it alone utters the well-known "caw," the crow having a terrible Cockney accent, and calling out "care, care." Rooks are not so fierce and carnivorous as crows, living mostly on insects, and also freely eating corn and walnuts ; they are also fond of scraps, and haunt railway lines in hopes of food.



Photo copyright by Charles Reid]

ROOKS.

[Wishaw, N.B.]

The bare white face, which distinguishes the adult Rook from the Carrion Crow, is not present in the young ; but the difference in voice will always distinguish the two species.



Photo by O. J. Wilkinson]

[Lynn.

JACKDAW IN FLIGHT.

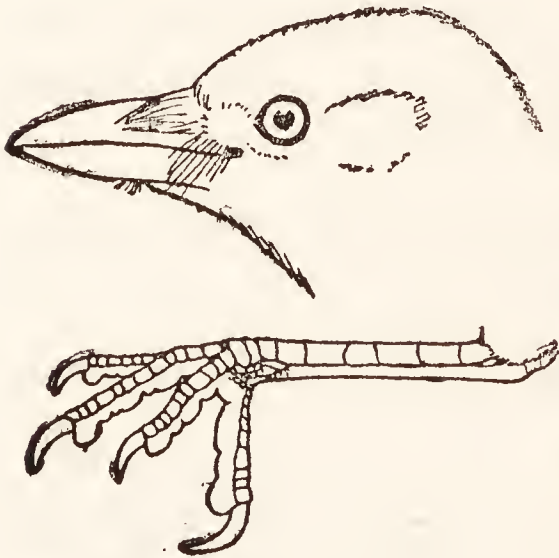
Showing the neck drawn in and legs drawn up, as usual with the Crow tribe when flying.

Rooks are much more sociable than crows, flying in flocks and nesting in colonies ; one rookery long lingered on near Holborn, the birds having for many years nested in the Gray's Inn gardens, though at last they shifted their quarters to the Temple. Their nests are placed in the twigs at the tops of trees, and are lined with grass and roots, while the crow prefers wool and fur ; but the eggs of the two birds are much alike.

Although nearly related and much alike, crows and rooks do not associate ; in fact, the crow persecutes the rook, and robs it of its eggs and young, and the Holborn rookery was once thus broken up, though the rooks returned as soon as the crows had been poisoned. Probably the retirement of the rook from London is very largely due to the safety his disreputable cousin finds there from the gamekeeper and his gun.

THE JACKDAW

THE JACKDAW may be known from the crow and rook by its smaller size, which hardly exceeds a pigeon's, its quicker walk and flight, and its sharp note " Jack " or " chack " instead of a croak or caw.



Head and foot of Jackdaw.

Close at hand it will be noticed that the jackdaw's bill is shorter than that of the other crows, and that it has a grey neck and white eyes ; in young birds, however, the

eyes are grey and the neck practically as dark as the black body.

The jackdaw has much the same feeding habits as the rook, and often associates with it ; but in inner London it is not a common bird, though now and then one

may see a pair or two. In some of the outer districts, however, such as Richmond, it abounds.

The nest is placed in holes of high trees or buildings, and is built of twigs ; the eggs are blue in ground colour, spotted with black.

THE MAGPIE

THE MAGPIE is easily distinguished among all our birds ; as big as the jackdaw, but differently formed, with short wings and a long tail, its conspicuous plumage of black and white always attracts attention, whether it is perched on a tree, walking on the grass, or flying, when its peculiar outline is noticeable, even when seen against the sky so that the markings are not visible.

Its feeding habits are like those of the carrion crow, and if it were commoner it would no doubt do much good by keeping the sparrow in check, for it is a confirmed nest robber. But it is rare in London, and only likely to be seen in wooded parts of the suburbs. Two lived till quite recently in St. James's Park, and used to nest in a tree there, but I never saw any more about, and fancy the birds were both of the same sex.



Photo copyright]

MAGPIE.

[By W. P. Dando, F.Z.S.]

The dark parts of the Magpie's plumage are not all black ; on the wings, and still more on the tail, there is a rich metallic gloss.



Photo by J. T. Newman]

FLEDGED GREEN WOODPECKER.

[Berkhamsted.]

The young Green Woodpecker is distinctly variegated, with light markings in its first plumage.

[See p. 92.]

The nest is built of sticks and mud, but, unlike that of any other large bird here, is roofed over with twigs. The eggs are blue-green, spotted with brown.

THE JAY

THE JAY forms a link between the crows and the small singing birds, which latter it resembles in shape, in the variety of its colours and notes, and in its hopping gait on the ground, unusual in a bird larger than a pigeon.

Its hues of cinnamon, black and white, with the large bright blue patch on the wing, are conspicuous in its slow, lazy flight, and its screeching call often draws attention to it when it is not to be seen. It has, however, a low warbling song, and is a great mimic, still sometimes kept as a talking bird.

It spends most of its time in trees, and is a most omnivorous feeder, eating insects and any other small creatures, the eggs and young of other birds, berries, fruit, peas, nuts and acorns. Being much more of a traveller than the magpie, it is not

uncommon in the London area, though not so conspicuous as the other crows ; it may be seen at Forest Hill, Kew, Wimbledon and Streatham. The young are as gaily coloured as their parents, but have blue instead of light brown eyes.

The nest is carefully concealed in a tree or bush, and is cup-shaped, like a big blackbird's nest ; the eggs are bluish, with so many fine brown markings that the ground colour is nearly hidden.

THE GREEN WOODPECKER

THE GREEN WOODPECKER is another bright coloured woodlander, but very different from the jay, except in size, and belonging to a quite distinct family.

It is the only one of our larger birds which is green in colour, and this green, of an olive shade, is set off by a crimson cap and a yellow patch on the lower back, conspicuous in the bird's dipping flight, when the long bill and outstretched neck are also noticeable.

The male has crimson moustache-stripes, those markings being black in the female, while the young are mottled with yellowish. This bird is usually only to be found in our outer well-timbered areas, but has even been seen in St. James's Park.

The green woodpecker feeds much in trees, climbing up the trunks and pecking away at them with its chisel-like bill in

search of insects, which, if not to be reached with the bill, it licks out with its long, worm-like barb-tipped tongue. Often, however, it feeds on the ground, especially on ants, hopping awkwardly about ; if it leaves tracks, these are recognizable by the toes being in pairs, like those of a parrot, not three in front and one behind, as usual in our birds.

When nesting it pecks out a hole in rotten wood, and uses no lining ; the eggs are white.

THE SWIFT

THE SWIFT, which is commonly mistaken for a swallow, is much more widely distributed in London than any of the true swallows; it may be seen occasionally anywhere in summer, and breeds here and there well in amongst the houses. In colour it is very dark brown with a white throat, young birds having pale-edged feathers, and seen against the sky it looks all black. It is bigger than any of our swallows, and has a different flight, extending its wings more at right angles to the body when flying, and sailing with them thus extended after every few flaps, while the true swallows often draw their wings in close to their sides.

The swift's tail is also shorter than a swallow's, and its feet are very different, with short toes, none of the four being turned backwards, so that the foot forms a



Photo copyright]

[By J. T. Newman.

SWIFT CLINGING TO A TWIG.
It cannot sit upon a perch like a Swallow.



Photo copyright by Charles Reid]

WOOD-PIGEON.

The white patches on neck and wing characterize this species of pigeon.

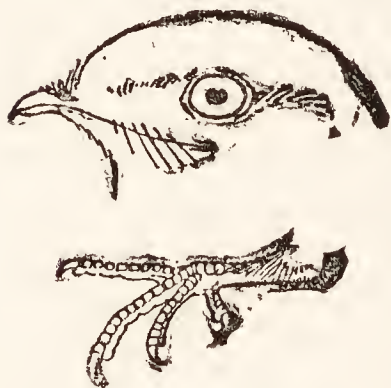
[Wishaw, N.B.]

“clutching hand,” with which the bird scrambles and crawls into its nest, or hangs vertically to a wall, for it does not perch like other birds. The note is a shrill harsh scream, very unlike a swallow’s twitter.

It feeds on flying insects, like the swallows, but nests in crevices in buildings, generally high up under the eaves of a house, often turning out the sparrow and saving itself the trouble of collecting bedding. The two eggs are long and white, and only one brood is raised during the year. In spite of this, swifts nowadays thrive better than the swallow tribe ; they come late, not before May, and leave in August, so that they run little risk of starvation during our cold springs and autumns.

THE NIGHTJAR

THE NIGHTJAR, so noticeable in the country for the loud whirring noise the male makes in the evenings, is shaped very like a swallow, but looks on the wing nearly as large as a pigeon ; its plumage is beautifully variegated with brown, black, grey



Head and foot of
Nightjar.

and buff, the sexes being alike except for some white markings on the wings and tail in the male, which also draws attention to himself by clapping his wings pigeon-fashion.

When not on the wing the nightjar is very hard to see ; it sits on the ground or along a limb of a tree, looking like a piece of bark, and, being a night bird, seldom appears in the daytime.

At Mansion House Station, on the Underground, can be seen a stuffed specimen

which killed itself by colliding with an engine. The bird may be found breeding on some of our large open wastes ; it makes no nest, but lays its two mottled pebble-like eggs on the ground. The young are downy, and can move about, but are fed by the parents, whose food consists of insects, chiefly moths and beetles.

I have once seen a nightjar at the end of summer fly over Marylebone Road to the southward, evidently on its migration, for it is only a summer visitor.

THE KINGFISHER

THE KINGFISHER is not an uncommon visitant, even to such interior London waters as the lake at St. James's Park, in the autumn, and has been found breeding in the London area. It is so celebrated for its brilliant plumage, the brightest of



Details of a Kingfisher.

all European birds', that most people are surprised to find it so small—hardly bigger

than a sparrow, in fact.

Its bill is long and stout, and its feet very small, scarlet in the old birds and black in the young, which, however, show as brilliant a blue and green above as their parents, though the chestnut breast is not so richly coloured in them.

All one usually sees of the kingfisher is

a gleaming blue spot as it shoots low over the water, looking more like a firework than a bird ; if its habits can be watched it will be seen fishing, plunging from a perch, or hovering and dropping from the air, and immediately rising if the swoop has been successful, to rap its prey on the branch and swallow it.

The eggs are laid in a hole in a bank, often dug out by the bird ; they number about six, and are white. The floor of the nest-chamber is covered with fish-bones ejected by the birds, but there is no other bedding.

THE CUCKOO

THE CUCKOO is to be heard in spring in outer London, but is a very secretive bird when adult, and is most often seen as a young bird on its passage south in autumn, when I have more than once seen it in the Zoo grounds, perched on an aviary.



Details of a Cuckoo.

These young birds are of a dark mottled brown, and as they perch in the open, and are nearly as big as pigeons, with long wings and tail and an easy skimming flight, are quite noticeable birds.

The old ones are grey, and so even more pigeon-like, but they often betray their species by calling, for the well-known note is uttered on the wing as well as from the bird's perch in a tree.

The food of the cuckoo consists of

insects of various sorts, especially hairy caterpillars, which other birds dislike, and so it is one of our most useful species, in spite of the destruction it causes among the small insectivorous birds.

These it entrusts with its family cares, placing its eggs in their nests, one in each selected ; the young cuckoo, when hatched, getting under its bedfellows and tumbling them overboard, a proceeding which does not at all distress the parents, which display the greatest fondness for the foster-child, although its huge appetite gives them a great deal of trouble.

Among our London small birds the robin, wagtail, and hedge sparrow are particularly likely to be favoured by the cuckoo's visits.

The hen cuckoo's note is a water-bubbling sound, very different from the well-known "cuckoo" call, which ceases with June, when the old birds unobtrusively retire to their winter haunts in the south. The cuckoo's egg is very small for

the size of the bird, and varies a great deal in colour, being most commonly mottled with drab, and not unlike the skylark's, but a very bad match for the robin's, and an even worse one for the hedge sparrow's, though this is the traditional foster-parent.

THE COMMON PIGEON

THIS PIGEON, in its blue variety, marked on the wings with two bars of black, is identical with its wild ancestor, the rock-dove of the cliffs; and as our London street birds live entirely uncontrolled, and some of them seek their food in a natural way on the river's edge at low tide and on the grass in parks and gardens, while even the street-gleaners are hardly more domesticated than the sparrows, they may fairly be included among wild birds, though no doubt, descended from tame pigeons originally.

The different colour varieties, blues, chequers, reds, mealies, blacks, etc., all associate and pair indiscriminately, and the only sex difference is the slightly larger size and bolder head of the cock, but this needs close observation of a known pair to be distinguishable, as in

the case of most birds where the sexes have the same, or practically the same, plumage.

The male bird, however, is very conspicuous by his frequent display, as he runs round the hen with a rapid, rolling coo, bowing and swelling his bright glittering neck, and sweeping his spread tail along the ground. Often, too, he takes gliding flights in the breeding season, with motionless wings raised rather above the back, in the pose of a soaring eagle. He also often takes heavy strokes with widely expanded wings, and produces a clapping sound by striking them together.

On the ground pigeons walk and run with remarkable activity considering their short legs, and their flight is faster than that of most birds. Like sparrows, they are very home-loving birds, and any particular specimen identified can always be found near the same spot. Their natural food is seeds and leaves of herbage, and small snails

and slugs, and they may be seen when on the grass picking the small seeding-heads ; they also eat the flower-heads of alyssum, and in a garden I have known tame pigeons devour the leaves of wallflowers. They much prefer grain, however, if they can get it, and in the streets find plenty of spilled horse fodder, besides the grains they pick from the manure like the sparrows. Like these, also, they eat all sorts of scraps, animal as well as vegetable.

They are very fond of salt, and anyone who feeds them would do them a kindness by mixing this with the bread. Among the grains, peas and small beans are their especial favourites. They drink largely, sucking up the water in a continued draught, not sipping it like other birds.

They build in holes and crevices of buildings and on sheltered ledges, generally very high up ; never on trees, on which, indeed, they rarely even settle ; the nest is made of any straws, etc., they can pick

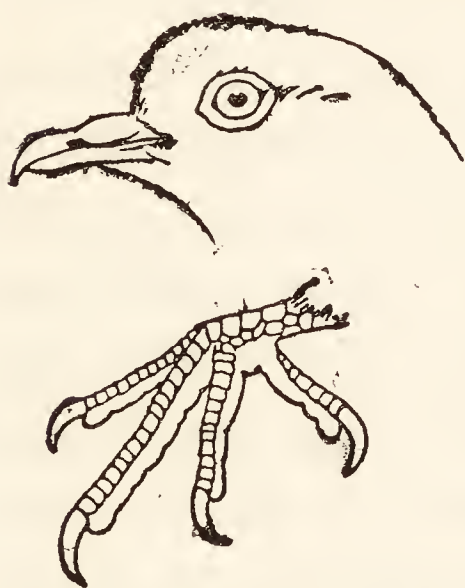
up, and the two white eggs are laid, not on consecutive days, but with an interval of a day between the two layings. Both parents sit, the cock during the middle hours of the day, and the hen during the night, early morning, and evening.

The cock calls the hen to the nesting-place by repeated long-drawn, moaning coos, and persistently drives her to it when she is about to lay. The young birds, which are helpless, thinly clad in scanty yellow down, are fed from the crops of the parents, and have a squeaking note. When fledged they may be known by their duller colouring, with no gloss on the neck.

THE WOOD-PIGEON

THE WOOD-PIGEON, if not nearly as numerous as the common pigeon, is, perhaps, more widely diffused over London, as it does not concentrate in the crowded streets,

but mainly inhabits the open spaces, being a bird of the trees.



Head and foot of Wood-Pigeon.

It is a larger bird than the common pigeon, and more stoutly built, with shorter wings and a longer tail ; the wings, when closed, fall short

of the end of the tail by a couple of inches, while in the common pigeon they come within an inch or less of the tip.

In colour the wood-pigeon is blue-grey, with no black bars or spots on the wing, but with a white band which forms an

edging to the wing when closed, and a bar across it when open. The neck shows less green gloss than the common pigeon's, and has on each side a patch of white, forming an imperfect collar, whence the bird is often called the ring-dove, the name dove having been formerly applied to all the pigeon family, as in the Bible.

The sexes only differ, as in the common pigeon, by the slightly larger size and bolder head of the male ; the young also, as in that bird, differ in being duller, and having no gloss on the neck ; they also lack the white collar, but have the white wing-band from the first. Some old birds are much duller and dirtier than others, and I have seen one with a silver-grey band at the end of the tail, instead of the usual black one, and another with a conspicuous white feather in one wing ; but as I have never been able to keep up my acquaintance with marked birds like these it is evident they do not keep about one

locality, and, moreover, anyone can see that their numbers in particular haunts vary much from time to time.

London wood-pigeons are, however, so much bigger and heavier on the wing than the country birds, and besides often so dirty, that many evidently do not leave London altogether, even if they have no fixed address unless when nesting.

Wood-pigeons are about the greediest birds we have ; besides the food given them by the public, which they often take from the hand, and of which they appreciate most of all monkey-nuts, they find plenty of natural food in our parks and open spaces ; on the ground they feed on clover, dandelion, grass-heads, etc., and go among the bushes to pick the seed-heads of chickweed, for they do not avoid cover like the common pigeon.

From the trees they gather other food the young leaves, flower-heads, and berries of the hawthorn, acorns, and ash-keys.

Here they have a great advantage over the common pigeon, which does not feed in trees, while they are at home even on the slender twigs ; but they walk and fly more slowly, and seem quite unable to run.

They often settle on buildings, selecting the highest point, while the common pigeon generally perches on some ledge or projection below the sky-line ; but their nest is almost always in a tree, and is a very small, frail platform of twigs, which, nevertheless, holds together in a most remarkable way. Many can be noted in our trees when winter leaves them exposed by the falling of the leaves, and often they may be seen even in quite low trees bordering busy streets. While this book was going through the press one was to be seen on a bough overhanging Piccadilly.

In the colour and number of the eggs, and the mode of rearing the family, the wood-pigeon is like the house-pigeon ; but its courtship is very different. Its show-

flight consists in “towering” up for a few yards, and then gliding downwards with expanded wings in a sort of aerial switch-back. It bows to the hen, but raises its tail instead of sweeping the ground with it, and does not turn round and run about; the courting note is not so long or so varied as the well-known cooing song which is such a pleasant sound in our parks and gardens. It runs thus: “Coo-coo *coo* coo coo ; coo-coo *coo* coo coo ; coo-coo *coo* coo coo ; cook!” ending so abruptly as to suggest “something gone wrong with the works.”

THE STOCK-DOVE

THE STOCK-DOVE is very like the blue common pigeon, but has no black bars on the wing, and a light-coloured instead of black bill ; neither does it show the white patch on the back which blue common pigeons usually have.

Its coo is short and grunting, and it is intermediate in habits between the wood and house pigeons, frequenting trees, but not building its nest on the boughs, but in holes. It also breeds in holes in buildings and cliffs, and sometimes frequents towns, but in the London area I have only seen it in Richmond Park.

THE TURTLE-DOVE

THE TURTLE-DOVE is a summer visitor only ; it is much smaller than the common pigeon, and very slim and graceful, with a long white-tipped tail. This and its chequered brown back easily distinguish it, though the rest of the plumage is mostly grey, with a patch of black-and-white feathers on the neck. This is wanting in the young, which are of a nearly uniform light brown ; but their white-tipped tails and small size render them easily recognizable. The note of the turtle-dove is as distinct from those of the larger pigeons as its appearance ; it is a purr rather than a coo, like “turr—turr,” and can be heard a long distance—a typical woodland sound in the height of summer.

When courting, the turtle-dove has a towering and volplaning show-flight, like the wood-pigeon, but the descent is much

steeper ; at this time the tail is spread, but not when bowing to the hen, though it is lowered to the ground.

The nest is built in bushes and low trees, and is like the wood-pigeon's, but much smaller, and the two white eggs are smaller than those of our other pigeons. It feeds on small seeds, and is not destructive to crops like the wood-pigeon, though it will eat corn.

The turtle-dove is only to be looked for where there is plenty of wood as a rule, but I have several times seen it even in Regent's Park, and this before the Zoological Society turned out some specimens from an aviary. They have also turned out specimens of the cream-coloured tame African Collared Dove, which do well and seem quite at home.

THE KESTREL

THE KESTREL, being our commonest hawk, is not infrequently seen about London. One has haunted for years the neighbourhood of Westminster, where my attention was first drawn to it by seeing it rise from



Kestrel hovering.

the level of the roadway. No doubt it had struck at a sparrow which had taken refuge under the bridge.

On the wing it looks not unlike a pigeon, but has a blunt-ended appearance, as it draws its neck in ; and its wings and tail are longer, while it frequently sails with

them outspread, level with the back, or stops to hover with quick flaps while it surveys the ground beneath.

Its colour is brown, barred with black in the hens and young, and spotted in the old male, which also has a blue-grey head and tail ; he is a little smaller than the female.

The Kestrel feeds on small birds, mice and large insects, catching and carrying its prey in its claws. It lays in hollow trees, cliffs, or high buildings, making no nest, but sometimes appropriating an old one ; the eggs are of a mottled red colour, and the young clad in white down. Although most often seen in winter, it breeds in our wooded areas, and owing to its fondness for mice is a useful bird.



Photo by York

[Emperor's Gate, S.W.]

PAIR OF KESTRELS.

The male bird, on the left, is distinguished from the female by his smaller size.



Photo by W. P. Dando, F.Z.S.]

[Regent's Park.]

TAWNY OWL.

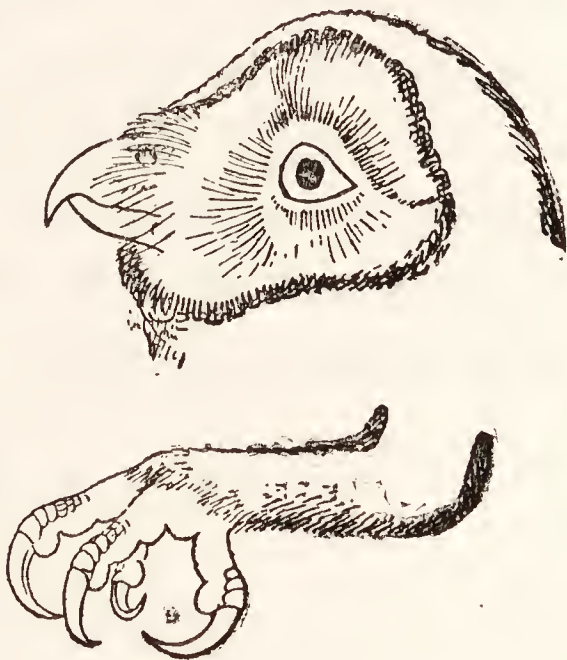
This is the species which utters the traditional
“tu-whit, tu-whoo.”

THE BROWN OWL

THE BROWN OWL, or Tawny Owl, is now quite common, even in inner London. I have heard its hooting in both St. James's and Regent's Parks. One can distinguish two hoots, a simple, long-drawn "hoo" and a tremulous "hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo," but I have heard these both uttered by the same bird; the note of the young is "ke-wick."

If seen, the bird will appear as a

large brown one, bigger than a crow, with broad wings and a soft, silent flight; when perched on a tree its mottled plumage of reddish or greyish brown is not very noticeable, and it keeps close by day—not



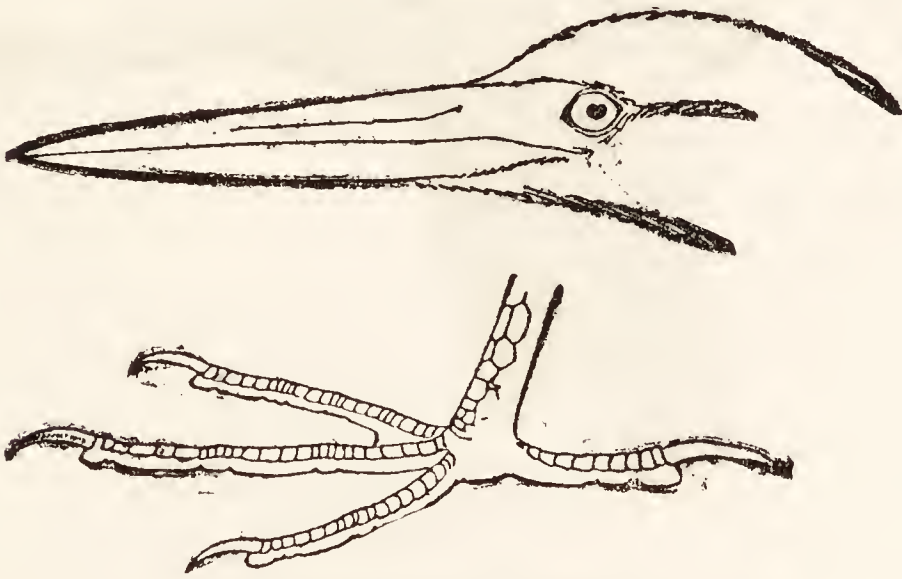
Details of an Owl.

that it cannot see then, for it sees well and even enjoys the sun ; but it is so persecuted by the other birds, that it gets little rest if they discover it.

Its head and dark eyes are particularly large, and its feet feathered, with strong talons with which it catches its prey, which consists of birds and small quadrupeds, and sometimes even fish. It lays its white eggs usually in a hole in a tree, making no nest ; the owlets are clad in white down at first, and then assume a fluffy barred plumage.

THE HERON

THE HERON is a tall, thin grey bird, about a yard in height, with long legs and spearlike bill. On the wing it looks very different, as it draws in its long neck, and extends its legs behind like a tail; the



Head and foot of Heron.

wings are so long and broad, and the body so thin, that when flying high the bird looks almost all wings. The sexes are practically alike, but the young birds are greyer, without the black and white colouring on the head and the long black crest

which gives the old ones such a picturesque appearance.

Hérons feed on fish, frogs, and most other small creatures they can capture, except toads, which they refuse on account of the poisonous secretion from their skins.



Heron flying.

Generally they wait for their food, standing in shallow water, but sometimes walk about searching for it, and they can swim well if necessary, though not web-footed.

They roost and build on trees, making a large nest of sticks, and generally in colonies ; such “ heronries ” are to be seen



Scholastic Photographic Co.]

[Wandsworth.]

PAIR OF HERONS.

These are adults; young birds have not the long crest-feathers.



Photo copyright]

[By W. P. Dando, F.Z.S.

LAPWING.

The Lapwing's long pointed crest distinguishes it at once from any of our birds.

[See p. 122.

in Richmond and Wanstead Parks, and stray birds sometimes appear even in Regent's Park. The eggs are greenish-blue, and laid very early in the year ; the young are clad in long grey down, and are helpless, the old ones bringing food and disgorging it for them.

They utter a note like "get-get-get" when in the nest ; the cry of the old birds is a harsh croak, not often heard. Herons move about both by day and night, but are most likely to be seen towards evening ; when not feeding they are particularly sluggish birds, standing in a hunched-up position for hours together.

THE LAPWING

THE LAPWING is a familiar bird in winter in fields a few miles outside London, and I have even seen it in Regent's Park and on Woolwich parade-ground. Its black and white plumage, with the back and adjacent parts of the wings glossy green, and a long thin crest on the head, is familiar, as the birds are commonly to be seen at the poulterer's.

Lapwings are about as big as pigeons, but stand much higher on the legs, and do not perch, but run about in the open, feeding on worms, slugs, etc. On the wing they look very different from pigeons, with their large, blunt-tipped wings, which work with a peculiar dropping action.

They belong to the plover family, and their large olive-green, black-spotted eggs are the well-known and expensive "plovers' eggs." They are wary, watchful

birds, active by night as well as by day, and their mewing cry “pee-wit” has given them one of their names. No birds are more useful than these, and as they suffer much in hard weather, it seems a pity to use them as food as well as taking their eggs, of which only four are laid at once, in a mere “scrape” on the ground. The young run at once, and are carefully tended by both parents.

THE COMMON SANDPIPER

THE COMMON SANDPIPER belongs to the same family as the lapwing, but is a very different bird, only about as big as a lark, but longer-legged and longer-necked ; the bill is also long.

Its plumage is light brown above and white below. It constantly wags its short tail as it runs by the waterside, and when it takes flight skims low over the water, uttering a shrill cry like “ peet, peet.”

The sandpiper is a summer visitor, and does not breed anywhere near London, but passes through when on migration, and may be seen even in St. James's Park.

THE MOORHEN

THE MOORHEN is the most widely spread of our water birds, frequenting not only the park lakes, but even the smallest ponds if there is some cover in the shape of reeds or bushes. It is a dark-coloured bird about the size of a bantam hen, and looks rather like one as it picks about on land ; but it is just as often seen swimming, though not web-footed.

The beak is yellow at the tip, and red at the root, and there is a bare red patch on the forehead ; the legs are yellowish green, and beneath the short tail, which is frequently jerked up, there are two patches of white feathers, which show very plainly when the bird spreads them out while courting or quarrelling.

The sexes are practically alike, but the cock is larger and has a bigger red forehead patch ; the young are different, being much

browner, and having no red on the bill or head.

Moorhens feed on almost anything, grass, worms, seeds, weeds, tiny fish, etc., and gladly come to feed on corn and bread when offered them. They often perch and roost in trees, though generally seen walking or swimming, and they dive fairly well.

They fly rather awkwardly, starting with a run and a flutter, with their legs hanging down limply, but if travelling any considerable distance stretch their feet out behind in a line with the tail ; they seldom fly far except at night. When moulting they cannot fly at all for some time. Their note is a harsh two-syllabled croak.

They build among reeds or on boughs overhanging the water, often in quite open situations, making the nest of rushes, twigs, etc. Several buff black-speckled eggs are laid, about as big as bantams' eggs, and the young, which are black when in the down, are tended by both parents,

which find food for them at first, as they are not so lively and independent as ducklings.

The nest is used as a sleeping-place, and the young of the first brood help in rearing those of the second, for, unlike most water-fowl, moorhens breed twice in the season.

Ultimately the old birds drive off the young, for moorhens are not very sociable, and may be seen to fight fiercely at times, grappling each other with their toes, which are particularly long and flat. They are also very plucky, and stand up boldly to larger birds. They are good for food, but need skinning, and are best stewed.

THE COOT

THE COOT is not unlike the moorhen in its feeding and breeding habits, and in the general colour of the eggs and young, but is much more aquatic in its tastes, and is seldom seen on land, while it dives very freely, jumping almost out of the water to drive itself under. It is much larger than the moorhen—nearly as big as a duck, in fact—and is slaty-black in colour, with the bill and bare patch on the forehead pure ivory-white. Its feet are peculiar, each toe having a separate web, which forms a scalloped fringe along the edges. When moulting, coots are unable to fly, like moorhens, but in the ordinary way their flight is stronger, and they expose themselves more on open water. They do not, however, frequent very small ponds, and are uncommon in London compared with moorhens.



Scholastic Photographic Co.]

[Wandsworth.]

COOT.

It is noticeable that the Coot, like the Moorhen, is not web-footed; but in the case of the Coot each toe has a conspicuous border of skin,

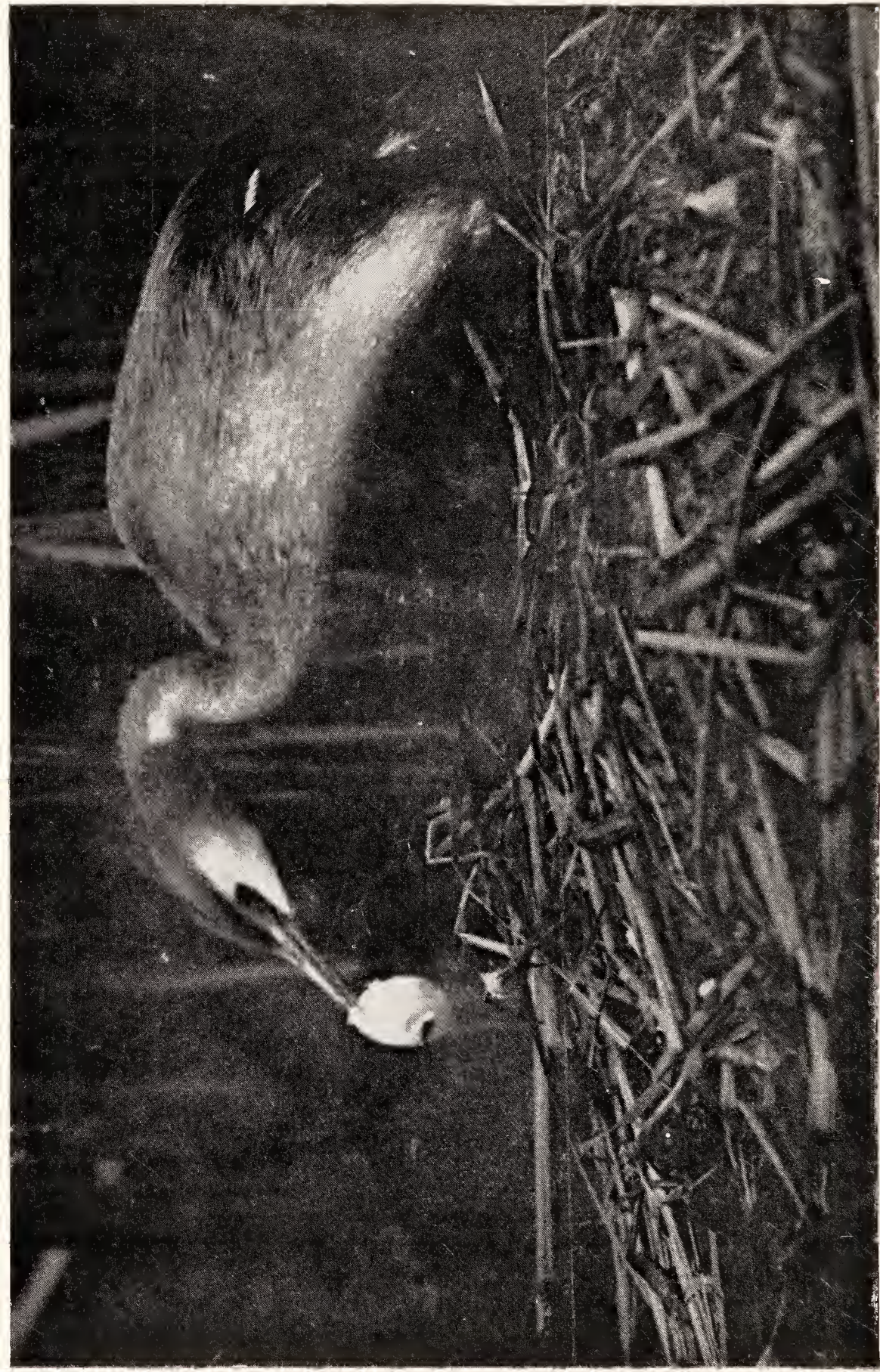


Photo by O. J. Wilkinson]

GREAT CRESTED GREBE.

Female bird removing an eggshell after hatching ; the pose is interesting, as some have said that Grebes cannot stand !

[Lynn.

THE SWAN

THE SWAN, like so many of our London wildfowl, is in a half-tame condition ; many of the specimens we see on our lakes and on the river are pinioned—that is to say, they have had the end joint of one wing amputated so as permanently to prevent their flying ; but many have never undergone this vivisection—which should be prohibited—and can fly where they like.

Swans, though they fly well and look magnificent on the wing, always rise with difficulty, and, like ducks and geese, cannot fly at all during the moulting season, as their quill feathers are shed nearly all at once.

The male swan can only be distinguished from his mate by his larger size and prouder bearing, and by having—supposing the pair to be of equal age or thereabouts—a larger knob at the root of the bill ;

but the young ones, or cygnets, are very different, being drab in colour, with grey instead of orange bills, which show hardly any knob.

By the time they are a year old they have become white, but before then their parents begin to persecute them, and if not pinioned they fly away to find homes of their own. They are excellent eating, and a fattened cygnet used to be a regular dish at great dinners. Swans build a huge nest of reeds, twigs, etc., on an island if possible, and it is dangerous to go near this, as the male, which keeps careful watch as he cruises about near it, will fiercely attack any intruder with heavy blows from his powerful wings.

The great olive-green eggs take six weeks to hatch, and the little grey cygnets are watched over by both parents, who pull up water-weeds to feed them; they are not nearly so active and independent as ducklings, or even goslings, and their

mother often carries them on her back. Besides water-weeds, swans eat grass and corn, as well as bread and other scraps, and often search the mud for various items of food as ducks do, sometimes turning tail-up like those birds.

THE WILD GOOSE

THE WILD GOOSE, which resembles the tame grey goose except for being smaller and more slenderly and elegantly built, sometimes visits London in winter, and until quite recently a small flock, which had the full use of their wings, though, no doubt, the offspring of pinioned parents, used to live in Regent's Park. They often took exercise on the wing, flying in a file according to the custom of their kind, but prudently disappeared when the wildfowl were thinned out in accordance with the war-time food restrictions. Geese feed mostly on land, eating grass even when tiny goslings, though they are ready enough to feed on corn and bread, which they bite up with their strong short bills quite easily.

THE WILD DUCK

THE WILD DUCK is one of our commonest London birds, and though many of the park birds show signs of tame descent in their varied colours, they can all fly, and plenty of undoubtedly wild birds live in the London area. The truly-coloured wild drake is a very beautiful bird with his green head, white collar and chocolate breast; even when white or otherwise abnormally coloured, he can always be known from other ducks by the curled feathers in his tail. The duck has not these curls, and is of a mottled brown colour, but shows the same blue-and-white bar on the wing as her mate.

During the summer months the drake moults into a plain brown plumage much like hers, but can always be distinguished by his peculiar voice, for he does not utter a full loud "quack," but a hoarse, thin,

wheezing “queykh.” When courting, a performance which goes on from autumn to spring, he rears up in the water, bending down his glossy head, and then drops down and throws up both head and tail, uttering a short low whistle as he rises.

The duck usually makes her nest among reeds or bushes, lining it with her own down, but often, as cover is scarce in London, nests, in the parks, in trees on broken-off stumps; in such cases the ducklings simply tumble down, being so light and so well padded with down that they can do this without injury. They are black-and-yellow in colour—the lighter varieties being all yellow—and are very active, feeding on water-animals and on flies which they catch on the surface. They often dive for food, though they generally give up this habit when full-grown, the old ducks usually confining themselves to exploring shallow water by standing on their heads.

In wet weather wild ducks often feed on land, and may be seen in the parks picnicking in pairs, the duck busily rummaging in the grass, and the drake keeping guard most of the time, but, though so devoted to his mate, and waiting for her to rise when they take wing, he does nothing to help her in watching over the brood, unlike the gander and the male swan.

Drakes fight a good deal in the spring, but there is more splashing than science in their vigorous attempts at boxing with their wings, and they are not vindictive in pursuing their rivals, though the ducks, by nodding and pointing with their heads, do their best to urge them on to a fight.

The wild duck is, indeed, a most good-natured bird, and thoroughly enjoys life ; it eats almost anything—grass and tender herbs, corn, bread, acorns, potatoes, worms, snails, slugs, frogs, fish—anything almost,

in fact, that it can get hold of, like its tame descendants.

It also takes a great pleasure in its toilet operations ; a set of ducks bathing have quite a water-tournament, diving, splashing, and taking “ headers ” with the greatest enthusiasm. It is, besides, a very intelligent bird, and well knows when and where it is safe ; in some parks ducks may often be seen feeding from people’s hands, and even jumping up to take the food offered to them.

Wild duck are commonly called Mallard by gunners and in books, but this name originally applied to the drake only.

THE GADWALL

THE GADWALL is a rare bird near London, but there are full-winged as well as pinioned specimens in the parks, and it is one of those birds which have been increasing in England of late years. The drake is brownish-grey with a black tail and bill, and a white patch on the wing which flashes out against his sombre plumage when he shows off, which he does in the same attitude as his relative, the common wild duck.

His note, however, is quite different, being a decided "quack," and he is very noisy in the spring. The duck is brown like the female common duck, but rather smaller, and easily distinguishable by the white, instead of blue, patch on the wing. In summer the drake resembles her.

THE PINTAIL

THE PINTAIL is also rare near London, but pinioned birds can be seen on the park waters. It is a very slender, elegant duck, and the drake's long black tail and white shirt-front contrast well with his silver-grey body and dark brown head.

The duck is slimmer and more neatly marked than the common wild duck, and has a longer tail, barred with light and dark, but no conspicuous mark on the wing. The drake in summer somewhat resembles her, but the details of his markings are different.

THE TEAL

THE TEAL is a pigmy duck no larger than a pigeon, and just as active on the wing ; it is not very uncommon in our area in winter, but pinioned birds in the parks run a great risk from enemies. The drake is pencilled-grey with a chestnut head banded with green along the sides ; the duck is mottled brown like the common duck, but, like her mate, has a brilliant green bar on the wing instead of a blue one. He is rather like her in summer, and the ducklings are like miniature common ducks' young ones.

The teal, when courting, poses like the wild drake, but quickly and jerkily, uttering a whistle ; his mate has a little quack.

THE WIGEON

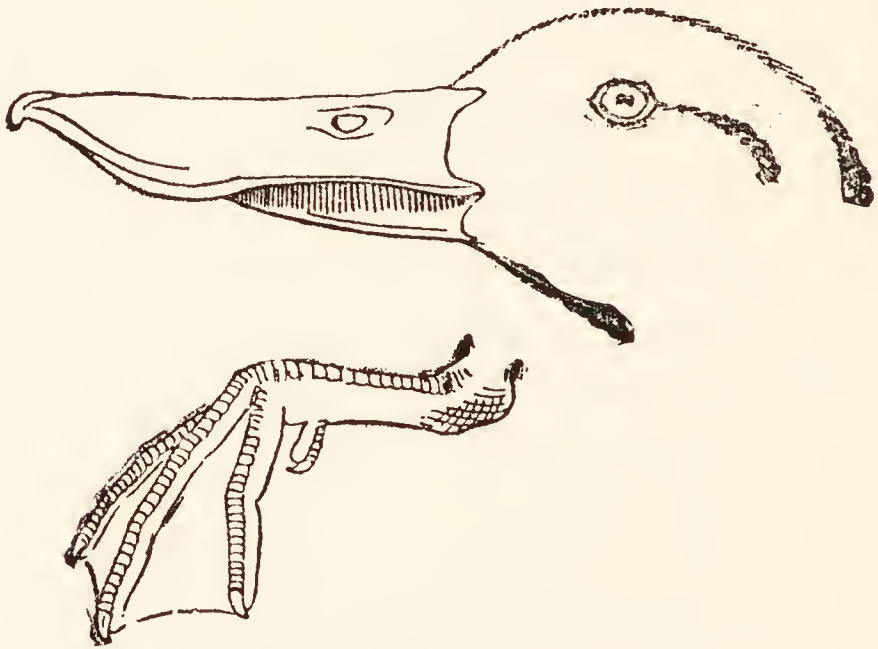
THE WIGEON often visits London reservoirs, etc., in winter, and there are some full-winged birds in the parks as well as pinioned ones; one female used to nest yearly in a flower-bed at the Zoo. The wigeon is a neat little duck, midway in size between the wild duck and the teal, with long wings and a small bluish bill. The drake is grey, with a black stern, a white wing-patch, followed by a green bar, and a chestnut-red head and pinkish breast; the duck a rather dark brown. In summer the drake assumes a reddish-brown plumage.

Wigeon ducklings are much like common ones, but have rusty-coloured cheeks. The wigeon drake has a loud whistling cry, and the duck a harsh growl; the drake, when showing off, behaves differently from the

ducks before-mentioned, drawing his head back on his shoulders and setting his back up. Wigeon feed a good deal on grass like geese, and are very active and noisy.

THE SHOVELLER

THE SHOVELLER is, like the pintail, seldom to be seen except as a pinioned captive on park waters. It is smaller than the common duck, and has a huge shoe-horn-



Head and foot of Shoveller Duck.

shaped bill, very effective in straining food from the water.

Except for the size and this peculiar bill, the duck is very like the wild-duck's female ; the drake is very gaudy, with a

green head, golden eyes, white breast, mahogany-red flanks, and wings adorned with blue and green ; but he is a dull bird in his ways, and his only idea of showing off is to bob his head slowly with a hoarse “ quok, quok.”

THE TUFTED DUCK

THE TUFTED DUCK is the merry little black-and-white diver, with golden eyes and long drooping crest, which is such a favourite in our parks. A few of these birds are pinioned, but most are full-winged, and probably really wild, though a good many have been bred on our London waters of late years, this being one of the progressive birds which are greatly on the increase in our country.

Only the drake is black and white, the duck being dark chocolate, with a much shorter crest and less brilliant eyes, and in summer the drake's crest becomes shorter and his white sides become smoky-grey. He is a very silent bird, but the duck sometimes utters a harsh, grating croak.

Coming in in the autumn, the tufted ducks stay till the end of spring, when most of them disappear. Those that stay to breed

nest on the ground ; the ducklings are not hatched till about midsummer, long after those of the common wild duck ; they are sooty-black in colour, and begin to dive at once, though so small and light that they have to spring nearly out of the water to get impetus enough to drive themselves under.

Tufted ducks, though glad enough to eat bread and corn, feed chiefly on what they find under water, such as snails and small fish. Although there are generally more drakes than ducks, they are very little given to fighting ; yet they are particularly lively and active birds, except on land, where they waddle very awkwardly and seldom go far from the bank.

They fly about a great deal, apparently for the pure fun of the thing, though they do not rise as readily as the common duck ; as with that bird, the drake politely waits for his mate to rise, and both spin away together.

THE POCHARD

THE POCHARD is another diving duck which visits London in some numbers in winter; a few pinioned birds are always to be seen, and free specimens have bred at Kew recently. It is rather larger than the tufted duck, with a big chestnut-red head, pale grey body, and black breast and stern; the duck is of a darker and dirtier grey than the drake, and has a nut-brown head and breast. In summer the black parts of the drake's plumage become grey, and his head is duller in tint.

Pochard ducklings are marked like those of the common wild duck, but the dark parts of their down are not black, but olive-colour.

The pochard is not quite so active on the wing as the tufted duck, but equals

it in diving, and is not so awkward on land, though it seldom goes ashore. It is more of a vegetable feeder, and is the best of the diving-ducks for eating.

THE DABCHICK

THE DABCHICK is a very small diving-bird, hardly bigger than a thrush, with a short pointed beak, no noticeable tail, and very fluffy plumage, which is light brown in winter and when the bird is young, but in breeding adults dark brown, changing to chestnut on the neck. The toes are lobed, or separately webbed, and the legs very far behind; the bird seldom comes on shore, and is seldom seen flying.

It cannot spring up directly into the air, and starts with a long spattering run. At night it travels long distances, and may be found on London waters, especially in the summer; before the war it bred in St. James's Park.

Its note is a long rippling chatter, and easily recognized. It is a splendid diver,

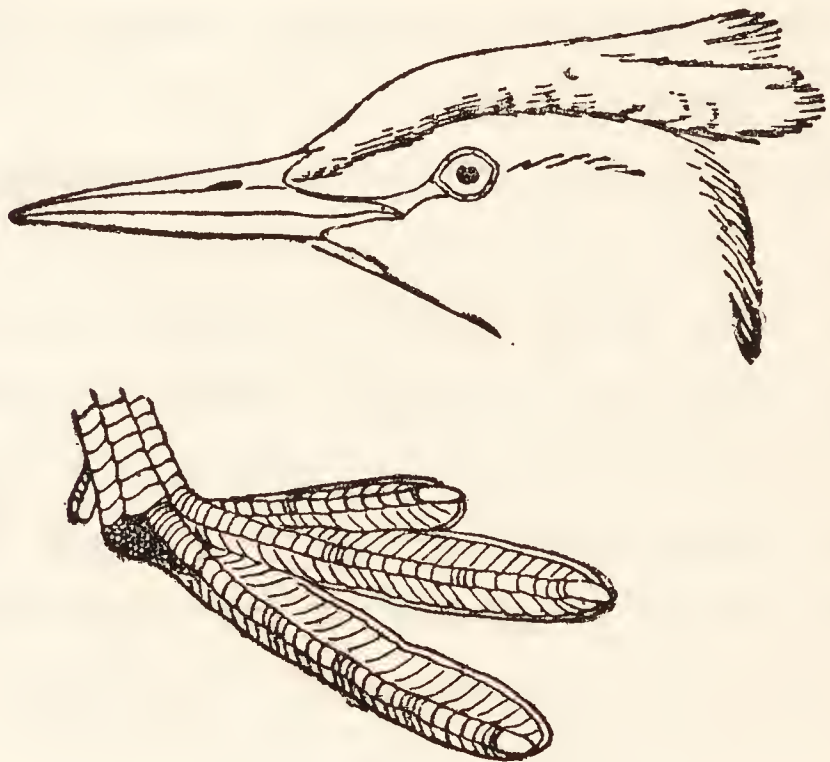
and when alarmed submerges itself so as only to show its head like a periscope.

It feeds on small fish and insects, and makes its nest on water-plants or boughs dipping into the water ; the nest is made of weeds or any rubbish, even paper, and is always wet.

The eggs are white, very like pigeons' eggs, but as the bird covers them over with wet weed when it leaves the nest, they soon get stained. Both sexes sit and care for the young, which are beautifully striped, and at first swim very little, being usually carried on the back of one or the other parent, under its wings.

THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE

THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE has the same general appearance and habits as the dabchick; but is a much larger bird, nearly as big as the wild duck, with a long white



Head and toes of Great Crested Grebe.

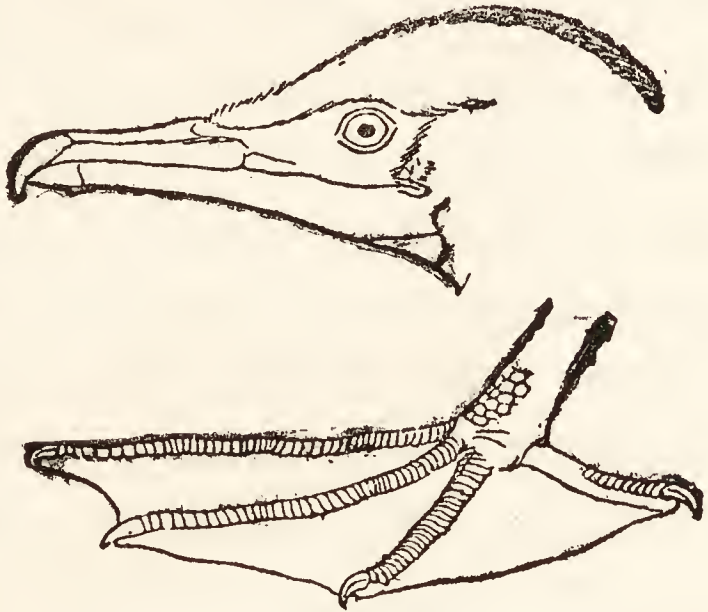
neck and long bill. In summer it has a black crest and chestnut and black frill.

It breeds on the Pen Ponds at Richmond, and I have seen it even in Hyde Park and Regent's Park; in the latter place a bird stayed for about a month at Christmas-time a few years back.

THE CORMORANT

THE CORMORANT is such a conspicuous bird among our park waterfowl that though, except these pinioned captives, I have only seen it once in London, I make no apology for mentioning it here, as it represents a very distinct family.

Its dark plumage, which is bronze above and black on the head and below, and



Details of a Cormorant.

its energetic way of driving through the water with head up and back and tail awash, make it conspicuous among the ducks, and it dives with the greatest neatness, sliding under smoothly with no apparent effort. It lives on fish, for

catching which its long hooked bill is well adapted, and when its fishing is done perches, very erect, on a rock or branch, often expanding and flapping its wings for some time.

In full plumage it has a quantity of thin white feathers on the head, and a white patch above the thigh. Its nest is a mass of sticks, and the eggs blue with a chalky coating of white. The young are downy but helpless, and the old ones feed them on fish, for which the nestlings thrust their heads and necks into the old birds' wide throats.

A pair used to breed for years in St. James's Park, and I have seen the male swallow a whole rat when thrown to him. The free bird I mentioned I saw was flying and swimming about on the Thames just below Westminster Bridge one cold winter day ; on the wing this bird is very easily recognizable, as it looks like a big black duck with an unusually long tail.

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL

THE BLACK-HEADED GULL is unfortunately named as far as Londoners are concerned, since during most of the time it spends with us a few smudges, like sooty finger-marks, are all that break the whiteness of its head ; but long before the birds leave us in the spring, many have put on their hoods, though even then the colour of the head is chocolate, not actually black, although at a distance it looks black enough. With the putting on of the hood the birds' feet and bills, which are usually blood-red, become almost black—the colour of dried blood, in fact.

The birds with black tips to their tails and bills, the rest of the bill and the feet orange instead of red, and brown mottling on their backs and wings, are the young ones ; there is no difference in plumage

between cock and hen, though the male is a little larger.

These pretty little grey-and-white gulls are the most charming of our birds, and are here when London particularly wants brightening, though they now arrive in earliest autumn ; I have seen young, with one pair, even squeaking for food, and showing much more brown than usual, so that they could not have been fledged very long. Yet this gull does not breed anywhere near London ; it is a marsh rather than a sea bird, breeding on swamps and on islands in pools, and feeding much in fields on insects and worms, as well as fish and other items obtained from the water or shore. These gulls also gladly eat any sort of scraps, and in hard weather are not content with begging and scavenging on the rivers and ponds, but hunt over land and even settle in gardens to be fed.

During their stay in London, these



Photo by]

IMMATURE BLACK-HEADED GULL IN FLIGHT.

Showing the great proportionate expanse of wing, retracted neck, and extended legs.

[A. H. Hall.



Photo by Ralph Chislett]

[Rotherham.

HERRING GULL ALIGHTING.

When settling, gulls are slower than other birds in closing their wings.

[See p. 156,

birds seem to sleep somewhere up the river, as towards evening they are to be seen flying upstream high overhead, in small or large parties.

They roost on the ground, although they often perch on buildings and sometimes on trees.

Everyone knows their harsh mewling scream, which is sometimes changed into a cackling laugh, whence the name "laughing gull" often applied to them.

THE HERRING-GULL

THE HERRING-GULL, although not nearly so common as the black-headed kind, is still numerous in London in winter nowadays, but it keeps to the river much more than the smaller bird, and mostly in mid-stream, not coming up to the sides and bridges to be fed, but scavenging on its own account, or chasing one of the small gulls which has gone off with an unusually big bit of bread.

Besides being much bigger than the black-headed gull—larger than a wild duck, in fact—it is more heavily built, with broader and blunter wings, widely tipped with black. Except for these black wing-tips, the old bird is all white and pale grey, and also has a yellow bill and eyes, and flesh-coloured feet, so that it has rather a pallid look altogether.

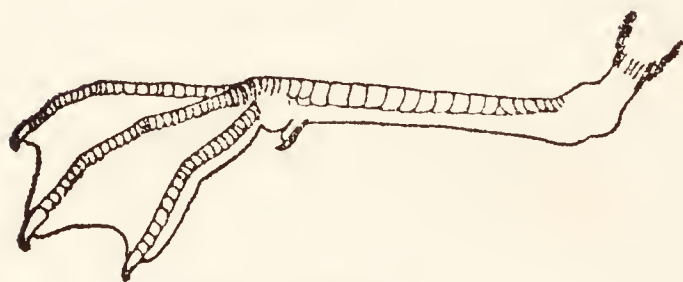
The young birds are absolutely different,

being mottled brown, with black bills and black tips to their wings and tails; they take years to attain their adult plumage, but birds in the intermediate stages are curiously shy, and certainly rarely visit us in London. The note of the herring-gull is a harsh many-syllabled scream, like "ah-kyark-kyark."

THE COMMON GULL

THE COMMON GULL, so called, is not nearly so common and widely spread as the last two, and only a few are to be seen among our winter visitants.

These birds are tamer than the herring-



Head and foot of Gull.

gulls, but not so tame as the black-headed; they are only slightly larger than these, but have the heavier build and flight of

the herring-gull, and both old and young resemble it in colour, though the grey of the old bird's wings is rather darker; in fact, they look like dwarf herring-gulls, both in the white and brown stages. Their eyes are, however, dark and soft, not of the sinister paleness of the big gulls'.

THE GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

THE GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL is rare, but I have seen a few in cold winters. It is a large noble-looking bird, nearly as big and as dignified as an eagle, with a deep gruff note and stately flight.

The old bird is easily recognized by the black wings, contrasting splendidly with the snowy body, but the speckled brown young bird is just like the young herring-gull except for size, and when seen at a distance this is not easy to estimate unless a herring-gull, young or old, happens to be near for comparison.

THE LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

THE LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL is also a scarce visitor. This is very slightly smaller than the herring-gull, and the brown young bird is practically indistinguishable from it in the open; the old bird can be known at once by its dark wings, though these are generally slate-coloured rather than actually black; the legs are yellow, whereas those of the great black-back are flesh-coloured like the herring-gull's.

